BIRKHÄUSER
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THONET und das moderne Möbeldesign
BENTWOOD AND BEYOND
THONET and Modern Furniture Design
Sebastian Hackenschmidt und
and Wolfgang Thillmann
MAK

Bugholz, vielschichtig

Thonet und das moderne Möbeldesign

Bentwood and Beyond

Thonet and Modern Furniture Design

Von By Sebastian Hackenschmidt
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MAK

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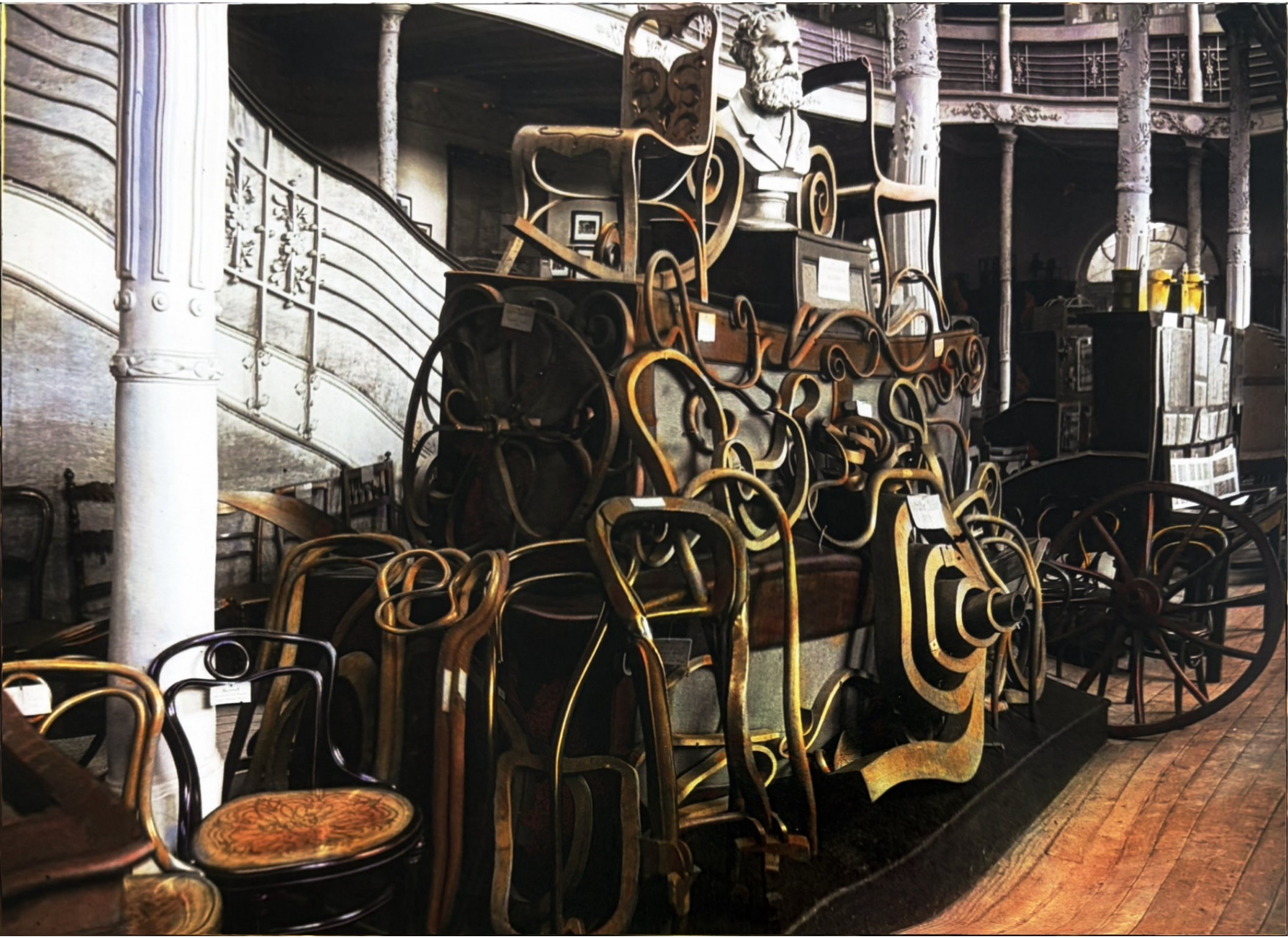

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Christoph Thun-Hohenstein
General Director, MAK

Porträt Michael Thonet; Lichtdruck, Wien, um 1912
Portrait Michael Thonet; Heliography, Vienna, ca. 1912

Thonet as a 21st Century Lifestyle Model

Thonet is not just a term for design aficionados but also–at least in much of Europe–a household name. The 200th anniversary of Thonet is therefore a worthy occasion to take a look back on modern furniture design in a comprehensive exhibition with an accompanying catalog. Even though the vast majority of people predominantly associate Thonet with bentwood chairs, and these are also the focus of the exhibition and this publication, this analysis of Thonet's 200-year history outlines a broad, multi-layered panorama of modern furniture design up until the present day. It is to the credit of the head of the MAK Furniture Collection Sebastian Hackenschmidt and his co-curator Wolfgang Thillmann, that with this approach exciting new perspectives on the design and reception of bentwood furniture as well as on the diversity and manifold cross-connections in furniture design since 1819 are opened. This is all the more important since a fresh view of the past often reveals surprising insights for the future.

I would like to single out a point that I believe is central here: This catalog graphically illustrates the development of Thonet chairs from industrially produced functional furniture to museally appreciated design classics. The "personal encounter" with these pieces of furniture in the exhibition (or elsewhere) makes it possible to understand the aesthetic and functional qualities to which they owe their permanent position as design objects. Thonet furniture also has a model character for a broader purchasing audience: Anyone buying bentwood furniture–be it vintage or from current production–invests in both durable quality and in the design status associated with it, and, moreover, expresses humble respect toward the resources which are processed in it. This combination of product quality and design prestige generates appreciation and increases the chances of gentle handling. Affordable, yet high-quality furniture (including new designs) from high ranking producers like Thonet make it possible for many people to acquire widely-acclaimed design objects and to enjoy their quality for a lifetime. It is better to spend a little more and to take care of what you have bought, than to constantly buy cheap disposable goods, which should be taboo in times of "Climate Care"!

It is up to companies like Thonet as well as to all of us as responsible consumers to make this vision of a sustainable quality society a reality. Museums like the MAK must be tireless drivers of this transformation in the interplay between tradition and innovation!

Sebastian Hackenschmidt

The Thonet Chair: From Functional Furniture to Design Classic

"Perhaps you will still remember when I picked up a standard Thonet chair, held it up, and urged those present not to let go of natural sources of form! For this worship of the Thonet chair I only succeeded in being branded by the Secessionists, without exception, as a non-artist."
– Adolf Loos[1]

The "Holy Chair"

On 11 May 1963, an exhibition which dealt with the images of mass media and pop culture and was meant to characterize the concept of "capitalist realism" was opened in Düsseldorf city center.[2] The artists Manfred Kuttner, Konrad Lueg, Sigmar Polke, and Gerhard Richter rented an empty butcher's shop at Kaiserstraße 31A and installed texts, pictures, and objects there, many of which can now be identified only with the help of the photographs that were taken—mostly by Manfred Kuttner—at the opening of the exhibition. One of these black-and-white shots shows a view from inside the exhibit location through the shop window, in front of which Sigmar Polke can be seen looking at the exhibits. One of the works of art in the foreground is a simple Thonet chair, which was already over half a century old at the time of the exhibition—this was model No. 360, which was first presented in the 1912 Thonet catalog.

What the black-and-white photograph of this "first exhibition of 'German Pop-Art'"[3] does not reveal, though, is that the chair had been painted magenta with luminous florescent color: In this way Manfred Kuttner had spiced up the old piece of furniture and ironically declared it to be the "Holy Chair." The artist had certainly taken the accusation of blasphemy into account in arch-catholic Rhineland: "a banal object as a representation of the *sancta sedes*."[4] However, the canonization of the piece of furniture through artistic appropriation also makes reference to its "ubiquity": Kuttner presented the Thonet chair not as a traditional antique, but—together with a bundle of magazines which Polke entitled "*Massenmedien*" [Mass media] and a washing powder package from Lueg—as a subject which was still very typical for the contemporary residential landscape, and thus as a living part of the popular and everyday culture, on which the "capitalist realism" of the artists fed itself.[5]

It may be doubted that Kuttner deliberately made use of a Thonet model; in fact, it was probably simply about an "ordinary chair,"[6] which was still widely used in the post-war period. After Marcel Duchamp's readymades—

1 Adolf Loos in a letter draft to Felix Salten (probably 1930), cited after: Burkhardt Rukschcio / Roland Schachel, *Adolf Loos. Leben und Werk*, Salzburg / Vienna 1982, 53.
2 Exhib. Cat. Cologne 2013: *Leben mit Pop. Eine Reproduktion des kapitalistischen Realismus.*
3 Cf. The press release for the exhibition at the Kaiserstrasse location (typescript, ca. May 1963), displayed in: *sediment* 7: *Ganz am Anfang / How it all began Richter, Polke, Lueg & Kuttner Leben mit Pop*, Cologne 2004, 72.
4 Christine Mehring, "Kapitalistisch-Realistische Informationskunst," in: Exhib. Cat. Cologne 2013/2: *Manfred Kuttner, Werkschau*, 16–32: 16.
5 The fact that furniture was considered as a consumer object in the context of capitalist realism is also confirmed by the October 1963 exhibition „Leben mit Pop" [Life with Pop] mentioned, which Konrad Lueg and Gerhard Richter organized in a furniture store in Düsseldorf.
6 Mehring 2013/2 (as in note 4).

Manfred Kuttner: „Heiliger Stuhl", 1962, Stuhl, Tempera, fluoreszierende Leuchtfarbe, Nägel, Privatsammlung; Sessel-Modell Nr. 360 aus dem Katalog der Gebrüder Thonet von 1912 Manfred Kuttner: "Holy Chair," 1962, chair, tempera, luminous fluorescent paint, nails; Private Collection; Chair model No. 360 from the 1912 Gebrüder Thonet catalog

which also included a bentwood clothing hook as it was displayed in the 1904 Thonet catalog–and the art of the Dadaists and Surrealists from the first half of the 20th century the early 1960s years mark the time when the utensils of everyday life were generally made "artworthy." While the illustrations of advertisements, film magazines, and comic strips served as models for Pop Art's pictures, all kinds of things–from simple household items to clothing and furnishings to technical equipment–were artistically reworked, rebuilt, used, alienated, made useless and destroyed, or fundamentally redesigned. In particular, furniture, as a frequently chosen starting or vanishing point, has acquired unusual aesthetic and symbolic qualities.[7] The simple and common Thonet chairs, which had been sold by the millions since the middle of the 19th century, could, even one hundred years later, in any case be considered the epitome of the chair. Since then they have repeatedly served as "material" for artistic discussions.

With his color-intensive overhaul of the Thonet chair, Kuttner–whose father operated a paint factory, and who therefore became one of the first artists to be able to make use of a newly launched, self-luminous coloring agent[8]–had in some ways preempted the re-designing which Alessandro Mendini was to perform on selected modern seating starting from the end of the 1970s. In addition to designs by Gerrit Rietveld, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Giò Ponti, and Joe Colombo, the Italian designer also provided the Thonet model No. 14 and Marcel Breuer's tubular steel chair "Wassily," which was designed around 1925 and later also produced by Thonet, with impractical–decorative or symbolic–additions made of plastic. As the design historian Gerda Breuer has thereto noted, Mendini ironized "not only the supposedly exemplary designs, but also gave more space for emotive values in design than did functionalism with its focus on usage and product quality."[9] Although Mendini's postmodern commentary on modern furniture was indeed a provocative-satirizing challenge to functionalist design dogmas, it also affirmed the chairs as classics in furniture history.

In contrast to Mendini, who used a best-selling product, namely Thonet's model No. 14 –the so-called consumer chair[10]–Kuttner used a comparatively less popular chair. Nevertheless, Kuttner's artistic intervention went beyond the simple exaltation of an everyday object, because as a work of art model No. 360 does not designate *a* chair, but *the* chair of the "Christian Occident." Thus, the confrontation with furniture in the context of art on the one hand formed the prelude to postmodern appropriation, on the other hand the beginning of the iconization of certain designers and their designs, which eventually resulted in the re-editions of the blooming "classics market."[11] Under the patronage of art–and here plastic works by Joan Miró, Jiří Kolář, Stefan Wewerka, Bruno Gironcoli, Mario Terzic, Paul Thek, Jannis Kounellis, Günther Uecker, and Birgit Jürgenssen from the 1960s and 70s can also be included–the Thonet company with its products was also gradually introduced into the pantheon of international design.

7 Cf. Udo Kultermann, *Neue Dimensionen der Plastik*, Tübingen 1967, 80 ff. as well as Heinz Ohff, "Der Gegenstand als Kunstobjekt. Das Kunstobjekt als Gegenstand," in: *Magazin Kunst* 42, 11th year, 1971, 2248–2277.
8 Thanks to Dietmar Rübel for this information.
9 Cf. Gerda Breuer, *Die Erfindung des Modernen Klassikers. Avantgarde und ewige Aktualität*, Ostfildern-Ruit 2001, 136.
10 On the development of this model see Wolfgang Thillmann, *Perfektes Design Thonet Nr. 14*, Bielefeld 2015.
11 Breuer 2001 (as in note 9), 72 ff.

Sigmar Polke vor dem Schaufenster bei der Vernissage der Ausstellung Kaiserstraße 31A am 11. Mai 1963 (Foto: Manfred Kuttner) Sigmar Polke in front of the display window at the vernissage of the exhibition at Kaiserstraße 31A on 11 May 1963 (Photo: Manfred Kuttner)

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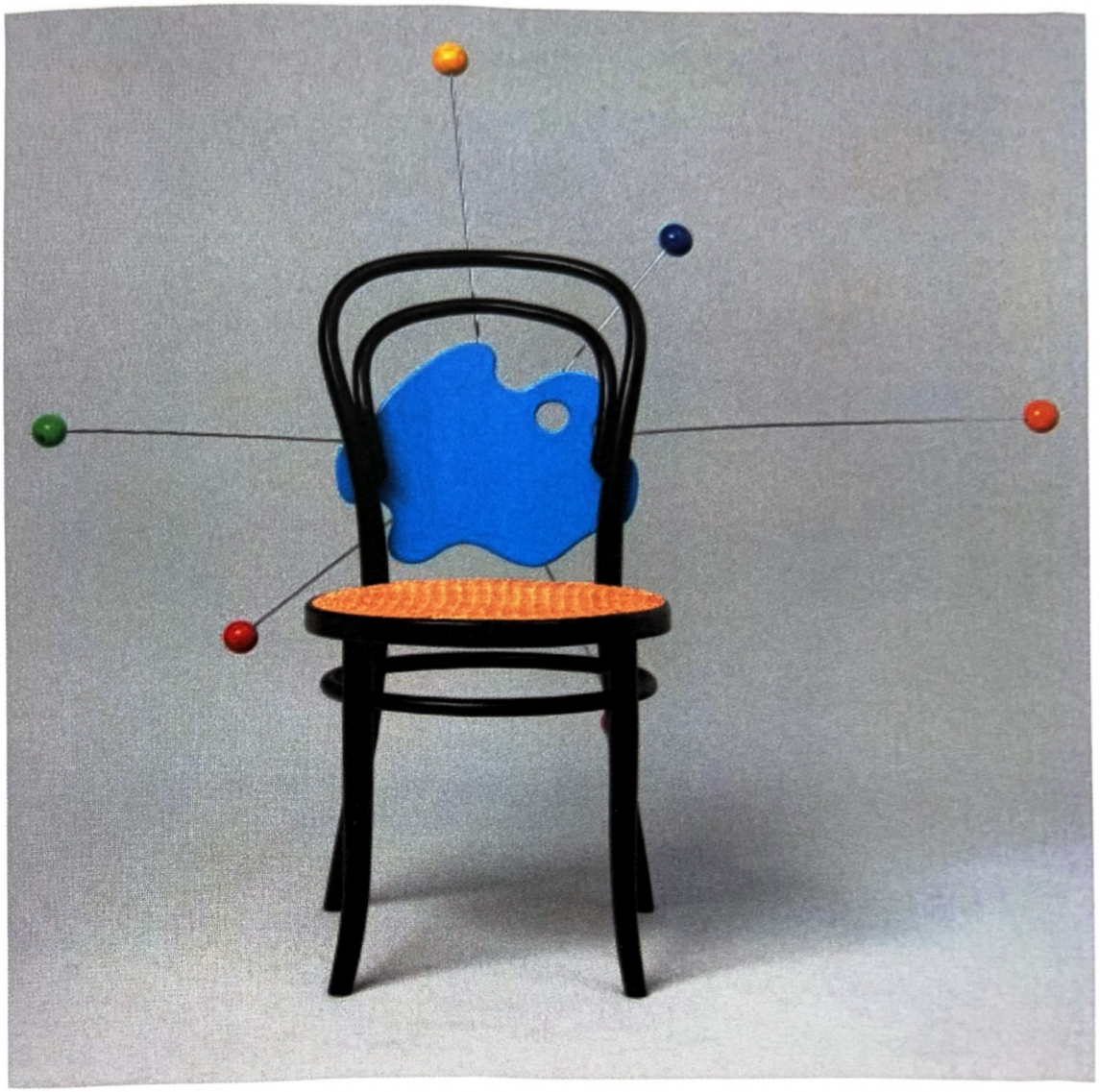
worden



Alessandro Mendini: Re-Design des Thonet-Sessels Nr. 14, 1978, Bugholz, Rohrgeflecht, Metall, Kunststoff; Studio Alchimia, Mailand
Alessandro Mendini: Re-Design of Thonet Chair No. 14, 1978, bentwood, caning, metal, plastic; Studio Alchimia, Milan

Alessandro Mendini: Re-Design des „Wassily" von Marcel Breuer, 1978, Stahlrohr; Leder, Kunststoff; Studio Alchimia, Mailand Alessandro Mendini: Re-Design of "Wassily" from Marcel Breuer, 1978, tubular steel; leather, plastic; Studio Alchimia, Milan

The Musealization of Bentwood Furniture

The success story of Thonet represents something of a myth of modern design history. In the middle of the 19th century, the German joiner Michael Thonet, who became self-employed in Boppard am Rhein in 1819 and had developed a promising wood bending technique for furniture in the 1830s, emigrated to Vienna for economic reasons: There he was able to perfect his bentwood furniture and establish the largest furniture empire of his time. With the model No. 14, which was produced starting in 1859, Thonet also created one of the world's best-selling pieces of furniture. It is now regarded as one of the absolute "classics" of modern industrial design.

Michael Thonet and his sons–the future Gebrüder Thonet–were certainly the first who were convinced of the quality of their products and the importance of their company. The international prizes achieved at the various world exhibitions since 1851 and the increasing sales figures proved them right. In 1896, not only a commemorative publication was published for the 100th birthday of the company founder[12], but also, at Vsetín Castle, which the family had acquired in 1890, the first museum was established with historical furniture, which originated from the private property of the family in Vienna, Koryčany, and Groß Ugrósz was opened. As Hermann Heller reports in his monograph on Michael Thonet, published around 1920, the pieces of this first collection, which were still preserved after a fire in 1915, came to the Technical Museum in Vienna: "This collection shows us that our master, even at the very beginning of his craftsmanship, created outstanding works, that he combined originality and solidity to a significant extent in his work. But what is more interesting than that is the fact that this collection can prove and trace the history of the Thonet's industry, or make it even more accurate; unfortunately, a part of this collection was destroyed in a fire in Vsetín Castle, the rest was incorporated into the Technical Museum in Vienna."[13]

This report is informative, not least because it shows that the aesthetic aspects of bentwood furniture were not the focus of interest at the time, but rather the technological and economic development of the company. Although Gottfried Semper had expressed the view in the second volume of his major work *Der Stil* [The Style] in 1863 that Thonet's method made the wood workable by force and that this did not correspond to the nature of the material, the bending of wood soon became a relevant factor for the economic and industrial development of the Imperial Royal Monarchy.[14] In 1876, the later Honorary President of the Austrian Trade Association, Wilhelm Franz Exner, published his paper *Das Biegen des Holzes* [The Bending of Wood], which was based on a lecture which he himself had given in the same year at the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry in Vienna–today's Museum of Applied Arts (MAK): Exner was sure that "the bending of wood in the crafts and in the art industry is still capable of a wide and varied application."[15]

The publication *Die Holzbiegerei* [Wood Bending] from Louis Edgar Andés, which appeared in print shortly after the turn of the century, con-

12 Cf. commemorative publication *Michael Thonet. Ein Gedenkblatt aus Anlass der hundertsten Wiederkehr seines Geburtstages, 2. Juli 1896. Von seinen Söhnen und Enkeln*, Vienna 1896.

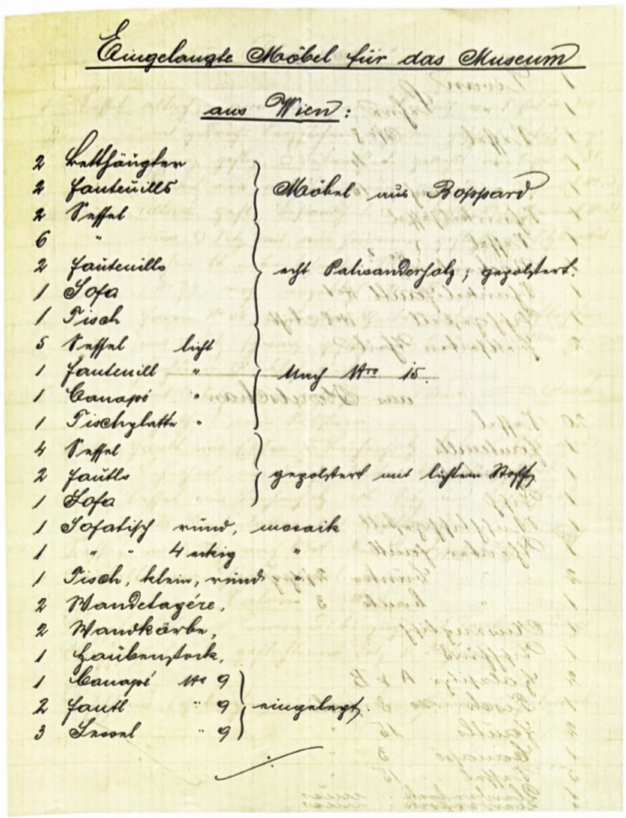
13 Hermann Heller, *Von der kleinen Tischlerwerkstätte zum Weltindustriehaus. Michael Thonet, der Erfinder und Begründer der Bugholzmöbel-Industrie. Lebens- und Charakterbild. Für Volk und Jugend*, Brno, without year (ca. 1920), 10.

14 Cf. Gottfried Semper, *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten oder praktische Ästhetik. Ein Handbuch für Techniker, Künstler und Kunstfreunde* (1860/63), 2nd volumes, Mittenwald 1977, vol. 2, 256.

15 Wilhelm Franz Exner, *Das Biegen des Holzes, ein für Möbelfabrikanten, Wagen- und Schiffbauer wichtiges Verfahren; mit besonderer Rücksichtnahme auf die Thonet'sche Industrie, nach e. im k.k. österr. Museum für Kunst und Industrie gehaltenen Vortrag*, Weimar 1876, 32. In 1868, Gebrüder Thonet had apparently given the museum the gift of bent wood pieces which Exner had used as demonstration objects in previous lectures. Unfortunately, these objects have not survived. Cf. Zl. 1868-438 in the file archive of the MAK. I thank Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel for supporting the archive research.

Marcel Duchamps Atelier, 33 West 67th Street, New York, um 1917, Philadelphia Museum of Art (Foto: Henri-Pierre Roché) Marcel Duchamp's Atelier, 33 West 67th Street, New York, ca. 1917; Philadelphia Museum of Art (Photo: Henri-Pierre Roché)

Kleiderhaken Nr. 2 aus dem Katalog der Gebrüder Thonet von 1904 Coat hook No. 2 from the 1904 Gebrüder Thonet catalog



Angelangte Möbel für das Museum aus Wien:

2 Halbfauteuils
2 Fauteuils
2 Paffel
6 "
2 Fauteuils
1 Sofa
1 Tisch
5 Paffel
1 Fauteuil
1 Canapé
1 Tischplatte
4 Paffel
2 Faulls
1 Sofa
1 Sofaschiff
1 " 4 sitzig
1 Tisch, klein, rund
2 Wandetagère,
2 Wandkörbe,
1 Fußbankerl,
1 Canapé
2 Fauteuil
3 Sessel

Möbel aus Boppard
mit Palisanderfolz; vergoldet.
Muf Mtr. 15.
vergoldet und Lisbon Moff
neugelangt.

Erste Seite einer Liste der Möbel, die 1896 von Wien aus in das erste firmeneigene Museum der Gebrüder Thonet in Schloss Wsetin geliefert wurden, darunter in Boppard gefertigte Möbel sowie Exponate der Weltausstellungen in London 1851 und Wien 1873 First page of a list of furniture pieces delivered from Vienna to Gebrüder Thonet's first company museum in Vsetin Castle in 1896, including furniture made in Boppard and exhibits from both the 1851 London World Fair and the 1873 Vienna World Fair

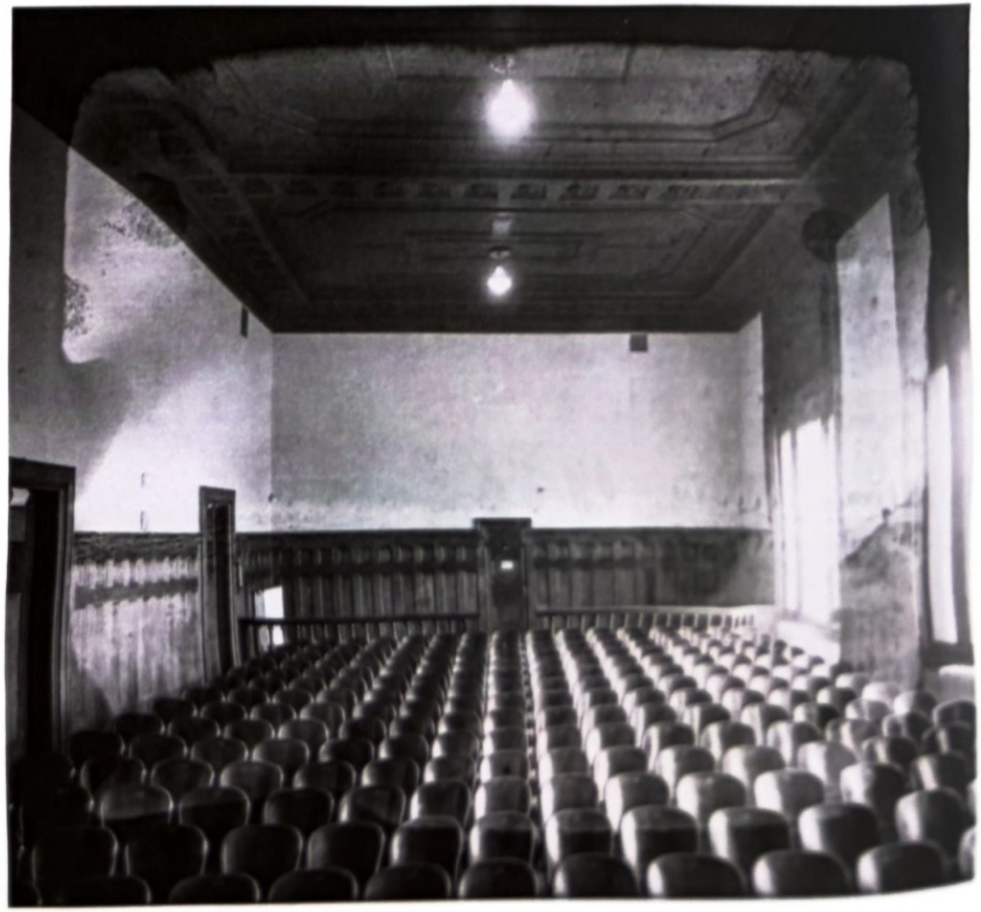
firmed Exner's assumption: "Among the industries which have seen significant growth in recent decades, that of bent wood is to be primarily emphasized and attributed not in the least to perfected mechanical devices."[16] The description of the mechanization of production processes must not cover up the fact that the wood bending process developed by Thonet, in the sense of an innovative material technology revolutionizing the furniture industry, meant nothing less than a revolution: The traditional, handmade chairs of the joiners had been supplemented by a modern industrial product which could be produced in much larger quantities and had conquered new markets. In order to document this step in industrialization, the furniture from the Thonet's private collection, which survived the fire of 1915, was handed over to a technical museum rather than an art museum.

Of course, right from the beginning Thonet chairs were used in the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry–as functional furniture: From 1864, immediately after the founding of the museum, an act which calls for the settlement of an invoice for furnishings from Gebrüder Thonet has been preserved. However, as the invoice itself has not been preserved, it is no longer possible to determine exactly which items were involved.[17] It is, however, possible to verify that, in 1872–immediately after the completion of the new building on the Ringstraße, built according to plans by Heinrich Ferstel–more than 100 pieces of the Thonet chair No. 8 were purchased from the company.[18] Around 1910, some of these chairs were given new plywood seats in order to serve as new furnishings for the reading room. In addition, the Lecture Hall of the extension planned by Ludwig Baumann and opened in 1909 was equipped with theater seating from Thonet. With its furniture, the museum therefore relied on high-quality, practical, and inexpensive industrial products; but even if the Thonet seating could be understood as an aesthetic statement on the part of the museum, it was therewith far from being "museum-like."

In fact, it was not until the end of the 1960s that Thonet's first bentwood furniture finally became part of the collection of the Museum of Applied Arts through a donation from the Federal Chamber of Commerce. These were the exhibits from an exhibition designed by architect Karl Mang in the *Österreichisches Bauzentrum* [Austrian Building Center] in Vienna, which had been set up using the private collection of the later gallery owner John Sailer in 1965.[19] After this exhibition–one of the first in the Post-War Period[20]–toured internationally for several years, more than forty objects were purchased by the Chamber of Commerce and passed on to the furniture collection of the MAK in 1969.

The purchase of over 70 objects of bentwood and tubular steel furniture from the collection of Alexander von Vegesack, which was concluded in the late 1980s, also resulted from an exhibition which had taken place in the MAK in the summer of 1986. With the offer to acquire a part of this collection, the museum had been given the opportunity to "catch up on omissions in purchasing activities at one dash," as the architectural critic Otto Kapfinger put it at the time.[21] The substantial expansion of the collection of furniture–supplemented by some important permanent loans

16 Louis Edgar Andés, *Die Holzbiegerei und die Herstellung der Möbel aus gebogenem Holz*, Vienna / Leipzig 1903, VII.
17 Cf. Zl. 1864-175 in the file archive of the MAK.
18 Cf. Zl. 1874-161 in the file archive of the MAK.
19 For a portrait of the collector John Sailer see Charlotte Kreutzmayr: "Vom Sperrmüll zum Sammelobjekt," in: *Parnass* 14 (Special issue: *Möbel*), 18th year, 1998, 114–116.
20 In 1953, the Museum of Modern Art opened its doors in New York, followed by an exhibition at UCLA in 1961. See exhib. cat. New York 1953: *Thonet Furniture, 1830–1953* Museum of Modern Art New York as well as exhib. cat. Los Angeles, 1961: *Thonet 19th Century Bentwood Furniture.*
21 Otto Kapfinger, "Bugholz und Stahlrohr. Möbel aus der Sammlung Vegesack im Museum für angewandte Kunst," in: *Die Presse*, 25 July 1986, 5. Other parts of the Vegesack Collection have also been acquired by the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, the Neue Sammlung in Munich, and the Stadtmuseum in Boppard. For a portrait of the collector Alexander von Vegesack see Maleen Thyriot, "Von einem, der auszog, Thonets zu sammeln," in: *Schöner Wohnen* 3, March 1981, 10.



Barbara Bloom: Thonet-Saal in der Schausammlung des MAK, Wien, 1993 Barbara Bloom: Thonet Hall in the MAK Permanent Collection, Vienna, 1993

from the Liechtenstein Collection–made it possible to devote a space dedicated to bentwood furniture in the permanent exhibition of the MAK at the beginning of the 1990s: The so-called Thonet Room was set up in 1993 as part of the reopening after the general refurbishment of the museum by the artist Barbara Bloom and has since remained virtually unchanged. The silhouettes of the seating furniture projected onto the partition screens are still one of the highlights in the artistically staged collection rooms of the MAK.

That the musealization of Thonet furniture–not only in Vienna[22]–began to take place on a larger scale only from the end of the 1960s may be surprising, since the functional and aesthetic qualities of bentwood furniture have repeatedly been recognized since the start of the 20th century. Especially progressive architects, who themselves used bentwood furniture in the interiors they designed–such as Le Corbusier in his *Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau* in 1925–often expressed themselves exuberantly: "We have introduced the humble Thonet chair of steamed wood, certainly the most common as well as the least costly of chairs. And we believe that this chair, whose millions of representatives are used on the Continent and in the two Americas possesses nobility."[23] The architect and designer Poul Henningsen also paid tribute to the so-called "*Wiener Stuhl*" [Viennese Chair] in the magazine Kritisk Revy, which he published, and even raised it to the level of a work of art: "The *Wiener Stuhl,* which is tenderly coddled by modern architects but regarded by the public as a simple chair, is in fact also a beautiful chair, a work of art in which the treatment of the material, the use, the production, and the price are all made compatible [...]."[24]

In an article that was likely launched by the company itself in the magazine *Profil* in 1933, Thonet explicitly invoked this approval in architectural circles: "Objectivity, rigor–technical line management–combined with maximum efficiency in terms of comfort and durability have been and still are the main characteristics of Thonet chairs. This has allowed the Thonet

22 Also in the Neue Sammlung in Munich, which probably houses the largest museum collection of Thonet furniture worldwide, "only in the 1960s was there an increased retrospective" on bentwood furniture. Josef Straßer, "Thonet in der Neuen Sammlung," in: Exhib. Cat. Cologne 2019: *Thonet & Design*, 8–14: 8–10.

23 Le Corbusier (1925), cited after Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command–A Contribution to Anonymous History,* New York, 1948, 492.

24 Poul Henningsen, "Tradition og Modernisme," in: *Kritisk Revy* 3/1927, 30–46: 44.

Andy Warhol: *Soup Cans*, 1961/62, Acryl auf Leinwand, 32 Tafeln; Privatsammlung Andy Warhol: *Soup Cans*, 1961/62, Acrylic paint on canvas, 32 panels; Private Collection

chairs to be regarded by leading architects here and abroad, even today, or rather, particularly now, as appropriate and beautiful."[25]

In the 1960s, under exactly these premises, the rediscovery of bentwood furniture, which led to its nobility and musealization, finally took place. In a critique of the exhibition which was shown at the *Bauzentrum* in 1965 and was to form the basis of the MAK's Thonet Collection architect Hans Hollein also paid tribute to the material and production-oriented design language of bentwood furniture: "The significance of Thonet lies in the fact that he was one of the first to use mass-produced industrial methods to fabricate products whose shape was largely determined by the process. The process of bending wood gave rise to new forms, sometimes of inexorable elegance and beauty, which were in keeping with the Industrial Age."[26]

Thonet Furniture as Design Classics

The fact that the general recognition of bentwood furniture as classics of design came at a relatively late date, namely not until the 1960s although its aesthetic and functional significance had long been established, can probably be explained only by the basic skepticism which the functional objects of the Industrial Age still faced for a long period of time: As aesthetically pleasing, functional, inexpensive, and durable, Thonet chairs were highly valued, but as widely used industrial mass-produced goods, they lacked an "artistic" value that would have justified their inclusion in a museum collection. In this sense, the passage of the draft letter cited at the start of this essay, in which Adolf Loos reminds us that he was the first architect in Vienna at the turn of the century "to worship" the "standard Thonet chair"—and that for this he was "branded as a non-artist by the Secessionists"—is also meaningful.[27]

25 (Without author), "Stahlrohrmöbel. Thonet-Möbel seit 100 Jahren modern," in: *Profil* 5, 1st year, May 1933, 177.
26 Hans Hollein, "Biegen oder Brechen. Thonet Bugholzmöbel aus der Sammlung Sailer im Bauzentrum," in: *Bau* 4, 20th year, 1965, 122.
27 Loos, as in note 1.

Eva Chytilek: *Der fünfte Stuhl*, 2008, Thonet-Bugholzstühle; Museum auf Abruf, Wien Eva Chytilek: *Der fünfte Stuhl*, 2008, Thonet bentwood chairs; Museum auf Abruf, Vienna

Bedeutsam ist diese Erinnerung insofern, als sie noch einmal die Schranken zwischen Hochkunst und

This memory is significant insofar as it once again visualizes the barriers between high art and trivial culture, which could not satisfactorily be dissolved in the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which had become fashionable around 1900, and which gradually began to decline in the course of the 20th century.[28] It wasn't until the 1960s, when with the images of Andy Warhol even tin cans–for Sigfried Giedion the epitome of industrial "full mechanization"[29]–entered the art museums, that inexpensive series products that had proven to be practical and durable and which had been able to assert themselves against passing fashions and taste dogmas were recognized as good design. In this context, Thonet's industrial products were no longer seen as cheap and ubiquitous commodities, but as incunabula of furniture history and valuable cultural assets: They became worthy of art and collection.[30]

Already in the time of Adolf Loos, who had his own chair design produced by the competitor J. & J. Kohn in 1898, the name Thonet was metonymic for bentwood furniture–just as the name Kleenex is representative of paper handkerchiefs, and Ohropax stands for earplugs and Scotchtape for transparent adhesive tape (in English speaking countries) today. In fact, the importance of Thonet as a model for contemporary industrial design cannot be overestimated: Hardly any description of design history does not mention the name Thonet, hardly any larger collection of modern furniture does not include at least one Thonet chair. The fact that seating furniture–in particular chairs–is now undisputedly the leading medium in furniture has also contributed to the company's success story. Until the end of the 19th century, it was the cabinets on which precious and exotic materials were processed and new craftsmanship and processing techniques were tested, but it was the modern seating furniture that, due to its orientation on the body, slowly took the place of these traditional pieces of luxury furniture: It formed the new field of experimentation that promoted innovative social attitudes and approaches, and expressed the mental state of the times through the manner of sitting. The Thonet products, which were widely used in coffee houses, were groundbreaking in this respect and have had an impact on generations.

Correspondingly, this publication–which accompanies the exhibition in the MAK–also focuses mainly on seating furniture: It has always been the core competence of the company. Beyond the chronological overview, bentwood furniture is consistently embedded in the technological, typological, aesthetic, and historical development of modern furniture design for the first time. By comparing several objects, it is not only the innovations and development steps in the field of bentwood technology that can be made clear, but also the correspondences and divergences with other areas of furniture production. Thonet's furniture has had a great impact on design history, but it has also taken account of the taste of the times and taken on foreign influences. Last but not least, it is important to point out the caesuras that resulted in the numerous reorientations and repositionings in the 200-year history of the company. The exhibition and catalog thus go beyond the hitherto customary approach of focusing exclusively on bentwood furniture, and show, for the first time, the central importance of the Thonet brand in the context of general furniture design.

The MAK has an excellent furniture collection and one of the world's largest stocks of bentwood furniture; nevertheless, the realization of this demanding compilation was possible only through the support and loans from institutions, businesses, and private parties, for which I would like

28 See also Kirk Varnedoe / Adam Gopnik, *High & Low. Modern Art and Popular Culture*, New York, 1990.

29 Cf. Giedion 1982 (as in note 23), 63.

30 In addition to the bentwood furniture, this also applies to the tubular steel furniture that the company produced starting in the late 1920s, even if it–above all because of the much higher sales prices–was not as widely distributed.

Rolf Sachs: „Franz bezirzt Mart“, 2019, Freischwinger, Rom, 2019
Rolf Sachs: “Franz bezirzt Mart,” 2019, Cantilever chair, Rome, 2019

to express my very sincere thanks. I would also like to thank all the bentwood historians involved in this project–my co-curator and -author Wolfgang Thillmann in particular–whose systematic research and scientific meticulousness have helped lead us to many important findings concerning the development of bentwood furniture in recent years and made it possible to correct many false attributions which were often enough in line with the interests of the art market. Much is still to be explored and evaluated in the field of "Thonetology," but some aspects will probably still remain in the dark in the future: Especially in the area of attributions there are still many ambiguities–partly because until the Post-War Period the producers of bentwood usually attached little value to making the designers of their furniture public.

Although the economic importance of bentwood furniture in the furniture market has declined since the second half of the 20th century to the extent that its importance to the history of art has increased for museums, it is by no means a closed chapter in furniture history. The companies Thonet in Germany, Gebrüder Thonet Vienna in Italy, and TON in the Czech Republic now regularly collaborate with international designers in order to expand their product range with sophisticated designs. But also for many companies that are not specialized in bent wood, as well as for many freelance designers and artists, the subject of bentwood furniture is a constant challenge: In the context of traditional consciousness and innovation potential, the poles are formed on the one hand by products that can assert themselves on the commodity market, and on the other hand by objects that reveal their technological, typological, and aesthetic conditions in a previously unfamiliar way. At best, it is possible to reconcile the two aspects.

Friedrich von Borries / Frieder Bohaumilitzky: *„Mein letzter Thonet"*, Bugholz-Rollator, Berlin, 2019 Friedrich von Borries / Frieder Bohaumilitzky: *"Mein letzter Thonet,"* Bentwood walker, Berlin, 2019

Wolfgang Thillmann

Thonet in the 19th Century

Boppard 1819–1842

Michael Thonet, whose father had moved from Andernach to Boppard in 1786, was born in Boppard on 2 July 1796 and took over his father Franz Anton's joinery workshop in 1819. On 13 April 1820 Michael married the butcher's daughter Anna Maria Grass. Michael Thonet's marriage certificate lists his father's occupation not only as "tanner," but also as "joiner," "a fact of special importance which explains his, Michael's, choice of occupation, and the repeatedly mentioned establishment of his joinery workshop in 1819. If [Michael] Thonet's father had been successful in running his tannery his only son certainly would have had to take over the business. The joiner's workshop must have already been successful at that time because otherwise Michael Thonet would not have been able to marry at the age of 24, young for the times in which he lived, or be capable of supporting a family."[1]

In 1830 Michael Thonet began with his first attempts to produce furniture parts, mainly for chairs and armchairs, from single strips of veneer which were glued together–he speaks of "rails." These were boiled in bundles in a glue bath and then, while they were still hot, placed and pressed in molds. The bundles were made already so wide that one could cut them into identical side frame sections for several chairs if cut longitudinally.[2] Using this procedure only two-dimensional components could be manufactured; these, however, sufficed for the desired shapes. For the visible outer sides of the furniture Thonet used veneer made of nut or cherry wood, for the non-visible parts on the inside of the furniture woods of inferior quality were used.

With its basic design the Boppard Chair is a typical piece of late Biedermeier period furniture, Michael Thonet did not invent this type of chair.[3] Still, already here one can see how a new manufacturing technique influences the shape of the product: The two-piece side frames, like the ones used in the Boppard chair, and also in the first chairs manufactured in Vienna, are possible only when using the technique of bent laminated wood.

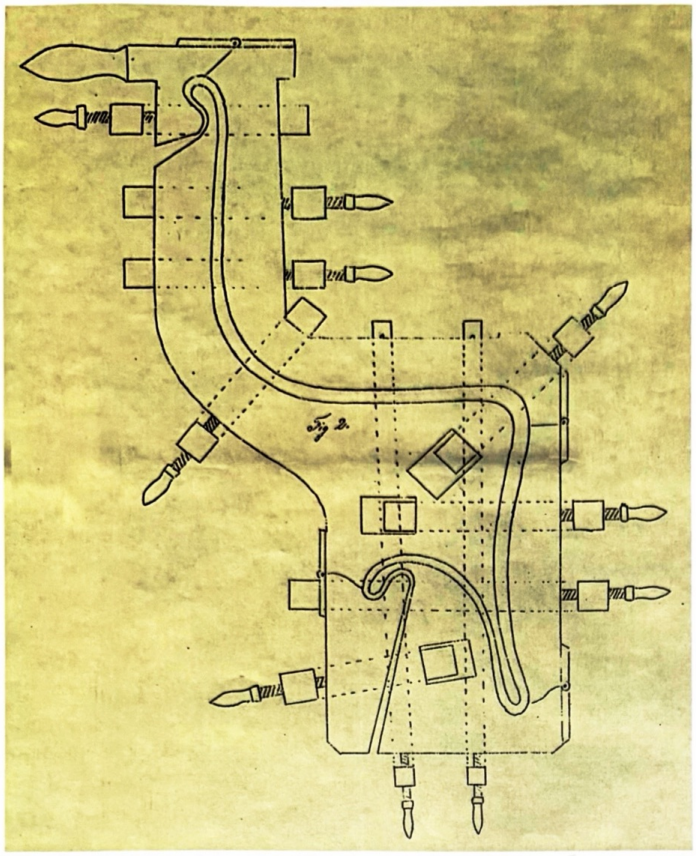
However, it wasn't primarily design reasons that led to the "invention" of this kind of side frame construction. Most importantly Michael Thonet solved a technical problem by using this method: The connection of the front and rear legs with the seat frame was a challenge in chair construction as this connection was usually not permanently stable. Michael Thonet's solution was revolutionary. He did not create a new type of connection or simply improve on the existing one, no: He eliminated it. The Boppard chairs have a seat and chair leg which consists of one

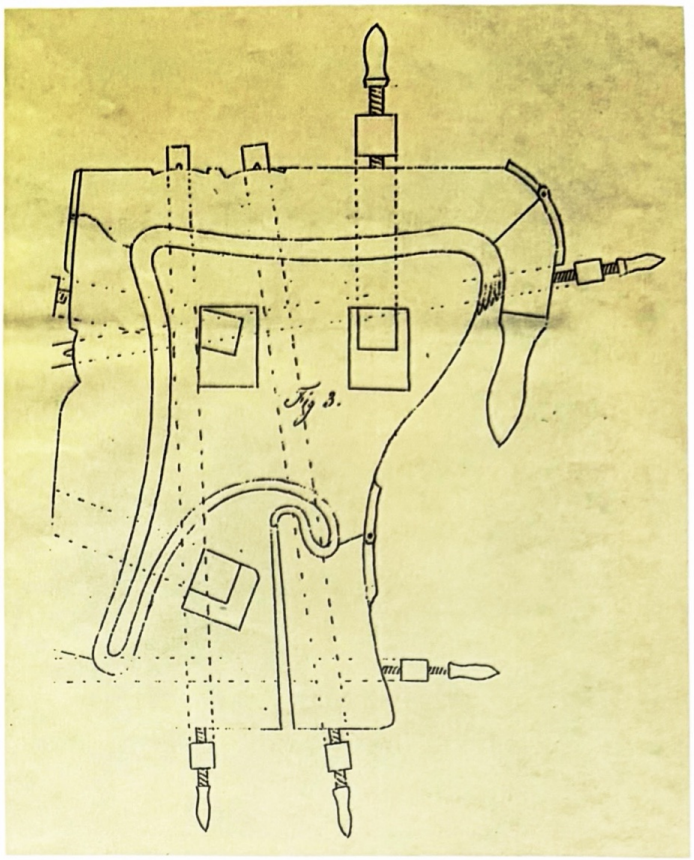
1 Reinhard Lahr, "Familie und Werkstatt Thonet bis 1842," in: Exhib. Cat. Koblenz 1996: *Thonet, Biegen oder Brechen*, 20–33: 21.

2 Cf. French patent application from 16 November 1841, "[…] elles puissent être coupées en plusieurs parties, et servir ainsi à composer trois, quatre chaises et même plus," in: Robin Rehm / Christoph Wagner (Ed.), "Transkription der Patentschriften," in: *Designpatente der Moderne 1840–1970*, Berlin 2019, 418.

3 Cf. Heidrun Zinnkann, *Mainzer Möbelschreiner der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt am Main 1985, 70ff.

Goswin Klöckner: Bopparder Stadtbild, 1742, Ausschnitt. Die Michelsmühle befindet sich östlich des Stadtturms, unterhalb der Marienberger Klostergebäude. Boppard cityscape, 1742, detail. The Michel's Mill is located east of the city tower, below the Marienberg monastery.





Zeichnungen von Pressformen zum Patentantrag Michael Thonets, Wien, 13. Mai 1842 Drawings of dies for Michael Thonet's patent application, Vienna, 13 May 1842

piece, so there can be no problems with durability, because this connection no longer exists. Still, the problem of stability, especially in the front legs, "the most sensitive part of the whole chair, where one must pay the most attention to the solidity,"[4] was to remain a matter of concern for the Thonets until far into the 1860s.

The manufacturing process was improved over time and by the end of the 1830s production in Boppard was standardized to such an extent that one can already speak of serial production. "In this way the work is extremely fast, the chairs are all identical in shape and size."[5]

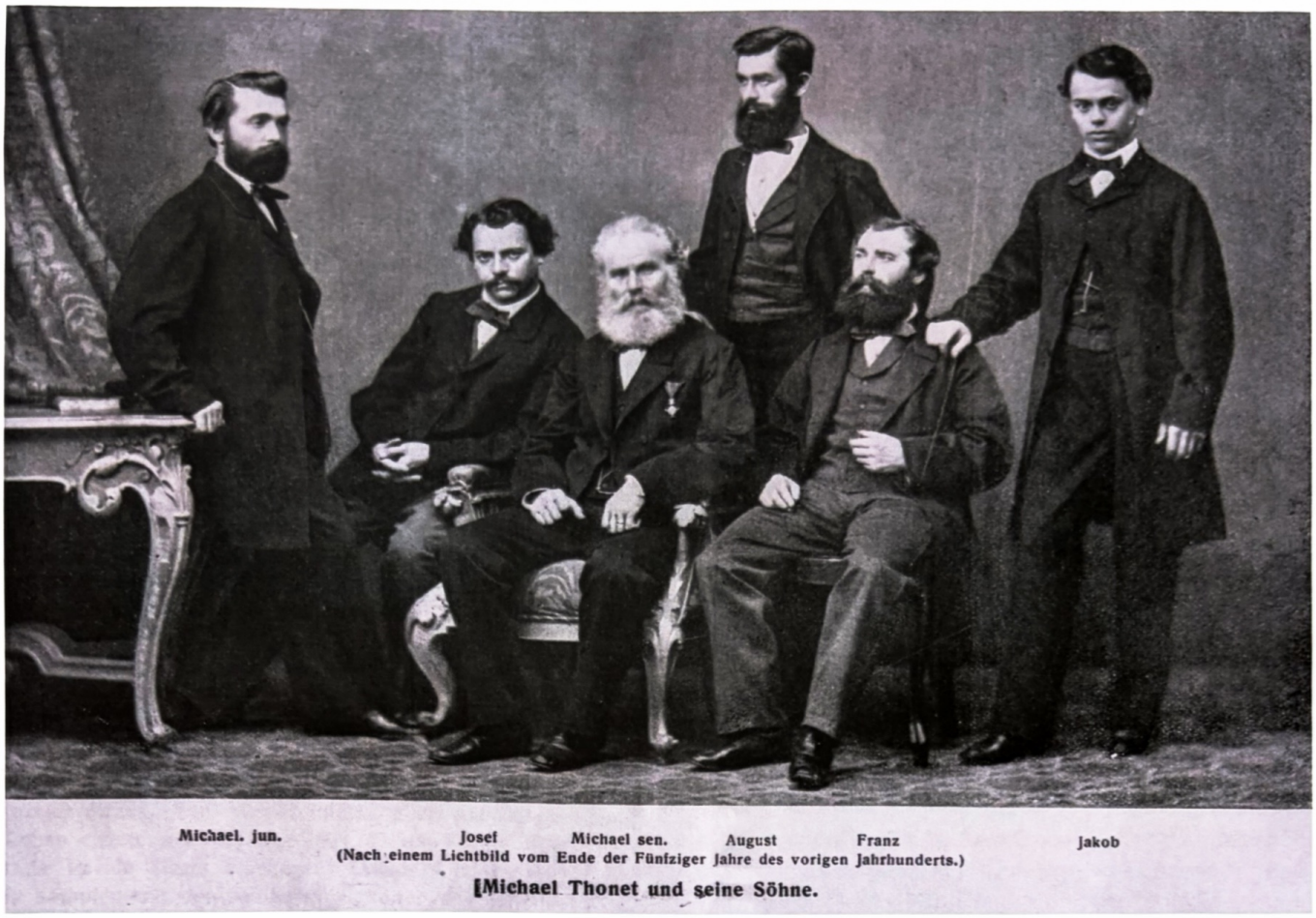
However, the new manufacturing process required a much greater amount of glue than traditional manufacturing techniques. Possibly for this reason, and with a view to serial production, Michael Thonet and the pharmacist Genius had already acquired the Michelsmühle [Michel's Mill] outside the city walls of Boppard on 2 September 1837 in order to build a glue factory there.[6] On account of numerous objections against this glue factory–the production of skin glue is associated with strongly unpleasant odors–and probably also due to Michael Thonet's meanwhile precarious financial situation, Thonet and Genius sold the mill in September 1841.

Due to the increasing competition on the Middle Rhine, Thonet had great interest in having the manufacturing process he developed protected, and in August 1840 applied to the royal government in Berlin for a patent "on the unique process, in which you use a press to give the wood of

4 Franz Thonet, Letter from 29 April 1857; Copy from Archiv Thillmann.

5 "De cette sorte le travail est extrêmement rapide, les chaises sons toutes identiques de formes et dimensions." Rehm/Wagner (Ed.) 2019 (see note 2), 418.

6 Cf. Wolfgang Thillmann, "Die Leimsiederei Michael Thonets: 1838–1841," in: Exhib. Cat. Koblenz 1996 (see note 1), 71–81. In addition, it is possible that Thonet also thought of commercially operating the glue manufacturing, i.e. selling the glue. In addition to the professional title "joiner," "gluemaker" also appears in a tax list from 1841. Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz (LHAK), 618/1128.

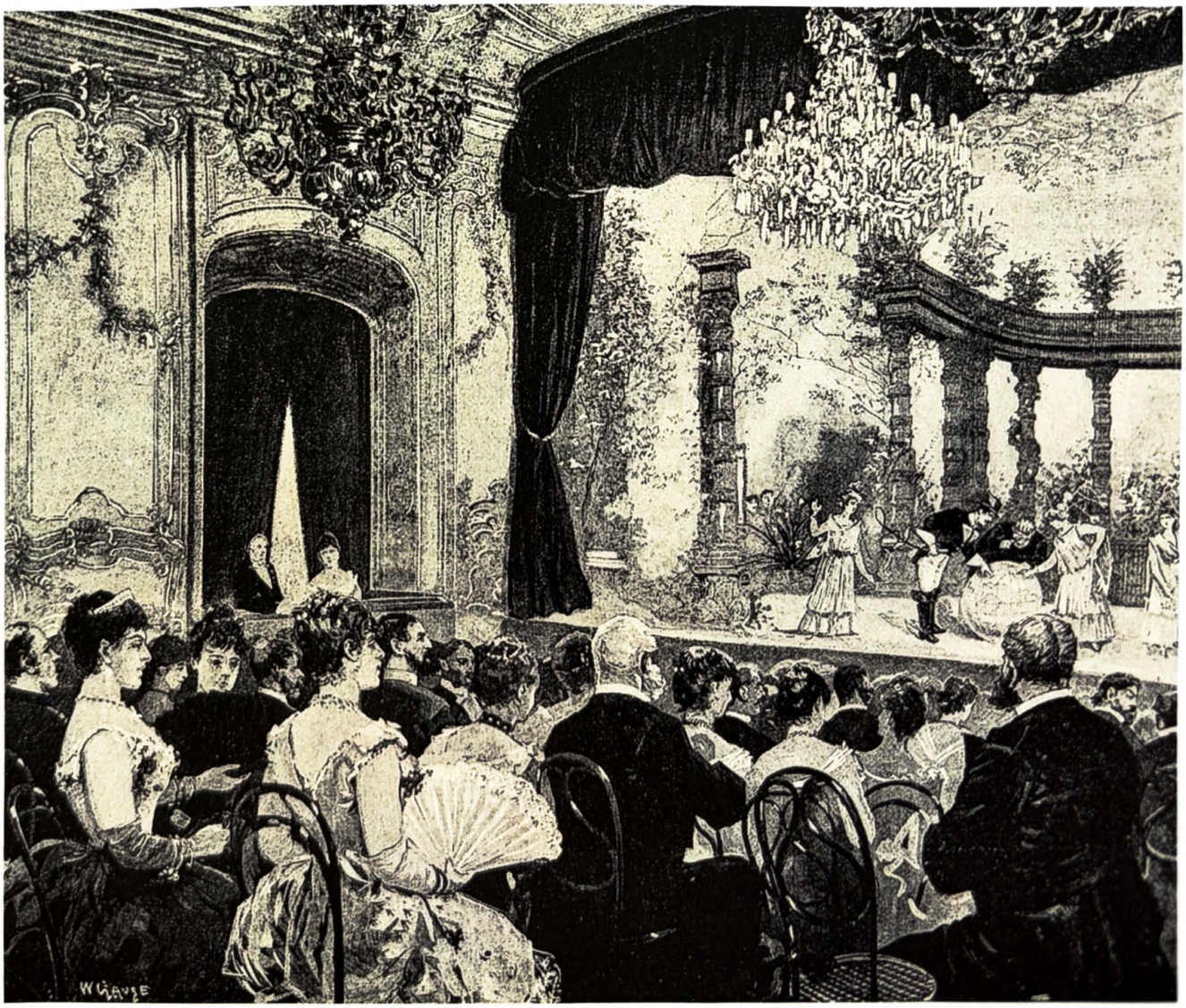


Michael Thonet und Söhne; Foto von Emil Rabending (um 1865), Lichtdruck, Wien, um 1912 Michael Thonet and sons; photo by Emil Rabending (ca. 1865); Heliography, Vienna, ca. 1912

furniture a corresponding shape."[7] The building inspector Lassaulx approved the application in an expert report requested by Berlin, but it was still ultimately rejected.[8] Moreover, the acquisition of various patents in France, England and Russia increasingly caused financial difficulties for Thonet, as these could not be exploited as successfully as he had hoped. The financial pressure on the family grew. In this precarious situation, Prince Clemens Metternich was made aware of Thonet's products at a trade fair in Koblenz in the spring of 1841.

Metternich, who as a staunch supporter of mercantilist trade policy had always had an interest in bringing new industries and trades to Austria, is said to have encouraged Thonet to go to Vienna, according to accounts found later in the company's records of its history: "My good man, that is all well and good. But in Boppard you will always remain a poor man. Go to Vienna."[9] Michael Thonet accepted this invitation in the spring of 1842. His sons Michael and Jakob followed him to Vienna in 8 September 1842, while his wife Anna Maria, and his son Franz, August and Joseph remained in Boppard for the time being. The eldest son, Franz, planned to run a "company business" with a certain Dr. Schmitz in Boppard, but nothing came of this plan. In the spring of 1843, "after a public auction of the properties belonging to Michael Thonet,"[10] the entire family moved to Vienna permanently.

7 LHAK, 441/5508.
8 The negative decision cites "lack of novelty" as the reason, but other reasons certainly also played a role. Cf. Wolfgang Thillmann, *Schichten. Möbeldesign vom Klassizismus bis zur Moderne*, Roentgen-Museum Neuwied, Munich 2018, 49–53.
9 Hermann Heller, *Von der kleinen Tischlerwerkstätte zum Weltindustriehaus. Michael Thonet, der Erfinder und Begründer der Bugholzmöbel – Industrie, Lebens- und Charakterbild*, Brno 1926, 12.
10 LHAK, 587/17, Notary public Holthof, No. 2451.



Theaterraum im Palais Schwarzenberg, Lithografie von Wilhelm Gause, aus: *Deutsche Illustrirte Zeitung*, II/II, 1886, 276 Theater room in Palais Schwarzenberg, Lithography by Wilhelm Gause, in: *Deutsche Illustrirte Zeitung*, II/II, 1886, 276

durch die Vermittlung
stellsessels beauftrag
bekannt werden sollt
den Hand

Thonet'scher Parkettboden im Palais Clam Gallas, Wien, Salle de Réunion (oben), Salon Beige (unten), 1856 Thonet parquet flooring in Palais Clam Gallas, Vienna, Salle de Réunion (above), Salon Beige (below), 1856

Vienna 1842–1856

In the spring of 1842 Michael Thonet arrived in Vienna, having traveled there with the coach of the diplomatic courier. His financier from Boppard, Johann Walter van Meerten, accompanied him. On 14 May, just a few days after their arrival, both applied for a right to "bend any type of wood into all forms imaginable using a chemo-mechanical method [...]."[11] This right was approved by the Royal Imperial Court Chamber on 16 July–a fact which was in itself not unusual for foreigners such as Michael Thonet. In the first half of the 19th century, the granting of privileges was a common form of promoting industry–in the spirit of mercantilism, according to which the common interest was essentially seen as identical to the interest of the state. The guilds and their strict orders which had emerged in the Middle Ages were an obstacle to the introduction of new and the expansion of existing trades and industries. Already early on, the authorities had created a means to also allow persons who did not come from the local guild or who–like Michael Thonet–were foreigners to pursue a trade, namely through the right to grant privileges. The main purpose of this was to create jobs or satisfy the needs of the population. Michael Thonet's first Austrian privilege from 1842, the other privileges from 28 July 1852 and 10 July 1856, the simple factory warrant from 8 July 1855, the "state factory warrant to produce furniture, parquet, and other wood products" from 9 November 1857, the transfer of this federal authorization to Moravia on 14 September 1858: All of these measures were protectionist in nature and served to protect him from attacks carried out by his colleagues and to make him independent from the joiner's guild.

However, due to a lack of capital Michael Thonet was not yet able to establish his own business or to exploit this privilege independently in 1842. In the first years in Vienna, he worked for the furniture manufacturers List and Leistler. At Franz List, located at 72 Mariahilfer Straße, Thonet made cheap chairs made of bentwood, as objections made by the Vienna guilds prevented him from becoming self-employed for the time being.

List, in turn, introduced Michael Thonet to the English architect P. H. Desvignes, who led the reconstruction and furnishing of the Liechtenstein Majorate House.[12] Desvignes realized that Thonet's privilege was well-suited to manufacture the desired parquet floors with their elaborate fretwork in the style of the Second Rococo. However, all the woodwork had already been promised to the manufacturer Carl Leistler. It was agreed that a contract between Leistler and Michael Thonet was to be set up, under which Thonet was to be allowed to perform all the work for the Palais Liechtenstein in the Leistler manufactory in return for a fixed payment.[13]

In addition to the "parquet production" he carried out a whole series of so-called "running chairs"–light chairs, which complemented the representative furniture as needed.[14] Desvignes had a decisive influence on the shape and design of this seating furniture. He designed the entire interior decoration and furniture executed by Leistler, but Michael Thonet

11 Austrian patent application from 14 May 1842; Archive of the Technical University of Vienna, Privilege-Registry-Number 4358.

12 On Peter Hubert Desvignes cf. Godfrey Smith, "The Desvignes Family," in: id., *The Forgotten Hamlet: Including the Corbett Estate*, London 1997, 22.

13 This agreement is the reason why we cannot clearly assign times to the different versions of the chairs that Michael Thonet made for the Palais Liechtenstein: Running chairs were supplied by both Leistler and Thonet, but Thonet's name does not appear in any of the numerous documents, as all carpentry work was billed through Carl Leistler. Thus, in the inventory from June 1847 "12 running chairs made of curved wood" [Hausarchiv Liechtenstein, Wien, K. 1853] are indicated for the Great Yellow Room, but it is not clear what version they are. Although we do find information on which of the numerous rooms the chairs were intended for or where they stood, later photographs do not help us, since they are running chairs that were moved from one room to another, depending on where they were needed.

14 Michael Thonet had already made a "running chair" in the style of the Boppard chair before becoming acquainted with Desvignes.

Ehemalige Mollardmühle (Mollardgasse 173): Hier befand sich die Werkstatt Thonets von 1853 bis 1858. Former Mollard Mill (Mollardgasse 173): Here the Thonet's workshop was located from 1853 to 1858.

Die Söhne Michael Thonets; Foto von Fritz Luckhard (1843–1894), Wien, um 1880, Heliografie von Karl Klič Michael Thonet's sons; photo by Fritz Luckhard (1843–1894), Vienna, ca. 1880, heliography from Karl Klič

Früheste Geschäftskarte der Gebrüder Thonet, 1852/53
Earliest business card from Gebrüder Thonet, 1852/53

was able to show that this type of chair could be made in a more elegant shape and lighter, thus a real "running chair."[15] Due to the novel method of laminating–it is no longer veneer strips being glued together, but rather fine square dimensioned rods joined in bundles–they were then able to produce three-dimensional structural components out of a single piece. Only the constructive opening at the transition of the front legs in the seat ring and the rear leg/backrest construction was filled with a carved solid wood part.

The transformation of the Palais Liechtenstein in Vienna had a very large impact and there was a series of remodeling work in other palaces. Thus, around 1850, Prince Johann Adolf Schwarzenberg also had the Gartenpalais Schwarzenberg furnished with Neo-Rococo-style furniture. Michael Thonet was commissioned, possibly through the mediation of Desvignes, with the production of a light occasional chair, which was to become known under the name "Schwarzenberg Chair." The "knotted" Liechtenstein chair, which was aptly called the "Snake Chair" in the handworker's invoices, was the prototype for this design.[16]

The chair for the Palais Schwarzenberg is a formally and constructively simplified version of this Liechtenstein chair type. The front legs are now solid and are screwed into the seat frame. The "knot" is used as an independent motif in the back. Similar to the Boppard chair, individual components can be combined. With a few changes along the way the Schwarzenberg chair found its way into serial production and finally became Model No. 1 in 1856.

In 1849, Carl Leistler refused an offer from Michael Thonet for a partnership. Thonet therefore began to work independently on the second floor of the house in Gumpendorf, at 396 Hauptstraße, at the corner of Kasernengasse.[17] Up until recently, literature assumed that the sons actively worked in the father's workshop, but actually that was not the case. August worked–at least temporarily–"with a Mr. Erlach in Währing,"[18] while son Franz had his own workshop: "[…] he is now working for himself and already has two journeymen, he makes inlaid table tops […]."[19] In light of this, the partnership agreement from 1 November 1853 is interesting. It says: "In addition, each partner has to participate equally, as necessary and as far as possible, in the exercise of the privilege and the operation of the manufactory set up for this purpose and no one is allowed to have a second business which is detrimental to the corporate enterprise."[20] The latter provision may possibly be seen as an indication of the earlier independent activities of some of the brothers; in any case, one wanted to prevent such activities from happening in the future.[21]

In 1850, Michael Thonet presented the chair model No. 4 in the Lower Austrian Trade Association. The belief hitherto held in literature that Anna Daum's Café was the first public establishment to be furnished with bentwood furniture is false. From a letter written by Michael Thonet Jr. to his

15 A comprehensive presentation of the re-furnishing of the Palais Liechtenstein can be found in Michael Huey, *Peter Hubert Desvignes und die Neo-Rokoko-Gestaltung des Stadtpalais Liechtenstein 1837–1849*, Vienna 1999.

16 The model for the Schwarzenberg chairs was the visible-wood "snake chair," in which the rear leg and backrest are already carried out in a single line. The prove that this model was the last one made for Liechtenstein is confirmed by the fact that it was manufactured until at least the end of 1857. In a letter from Joseph Thonet to the brothers on 21 December 1857 it is stated: "The mahogany chairs for Liechtenstein would be very beautiful if they were already finished […]."

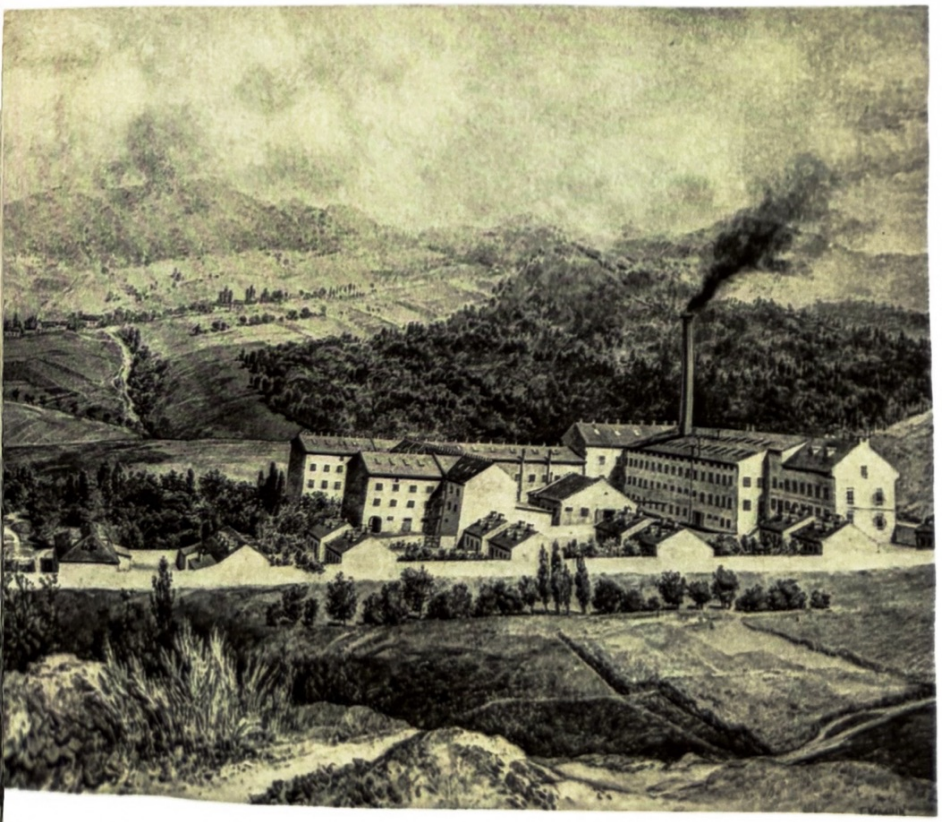
17 The earliest stamp found on Thonet's seating furniture refers to this address: "Thonet Wien Gump. 396." Whether it was used as early as 1849, however, is rather questionable. The year 1852 seems more likely. Cf. Wolfgang Thillmann, *Perfektes Design Thonet Nr. 14*, Bielefeld 2015, 27.

18 Cf. Letter from Michael Thonet Jr. to his friend Jakob Henrich in Boppard from 15.8.1851, quoted from: Ulrich Löber, "Jakob Henrich, Schreinermeister aus Boppard," in: Exhib. Cat. Koblenz 1996 (see note. 1), 35–49: 40.

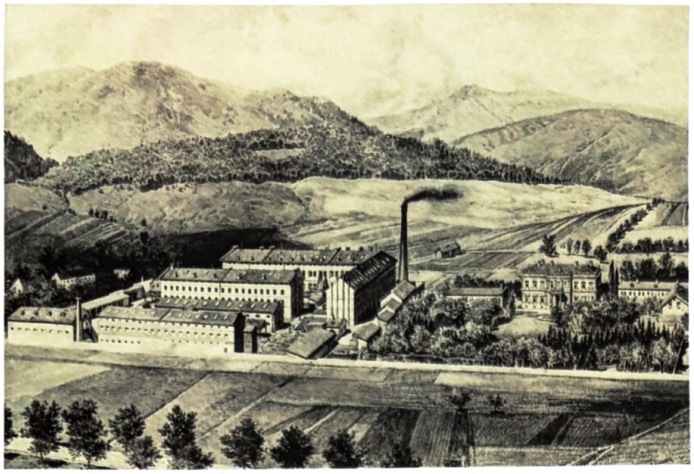
19 Ibid., 41.

20 Partnership agreement from 1.11.1853; Copy from Archiv Thillmann.

21 Also in the supplementary article of 31 January 1862 to this partnership agreement–Jakob Thonet is now an equal partner because of his age of majority–it is expressly stated once again that "none of the partners shall be entitled to conduct any secondary business on their own account." Ibid.



Fabrik der Gebrüder Thonet in Koritschan



Zweite Fabrik der Gebrüder Thonet in Bistritz am Hostein
Gebrüder Thonet's second factory in Bystřice pod Hostýnem

Lichtdruck von Josef Löwy, Wien, um 1890, gezeichnet von F. Kopallik
Heliography from Josef Löwy, Vienna, ca. 1890, drawn by F. Kopallik

Foto aus einem Album „Thonet Mundus", Mitte der 1920er Jahre
Photo from a "Thonet Mundus" album, mid-1920s

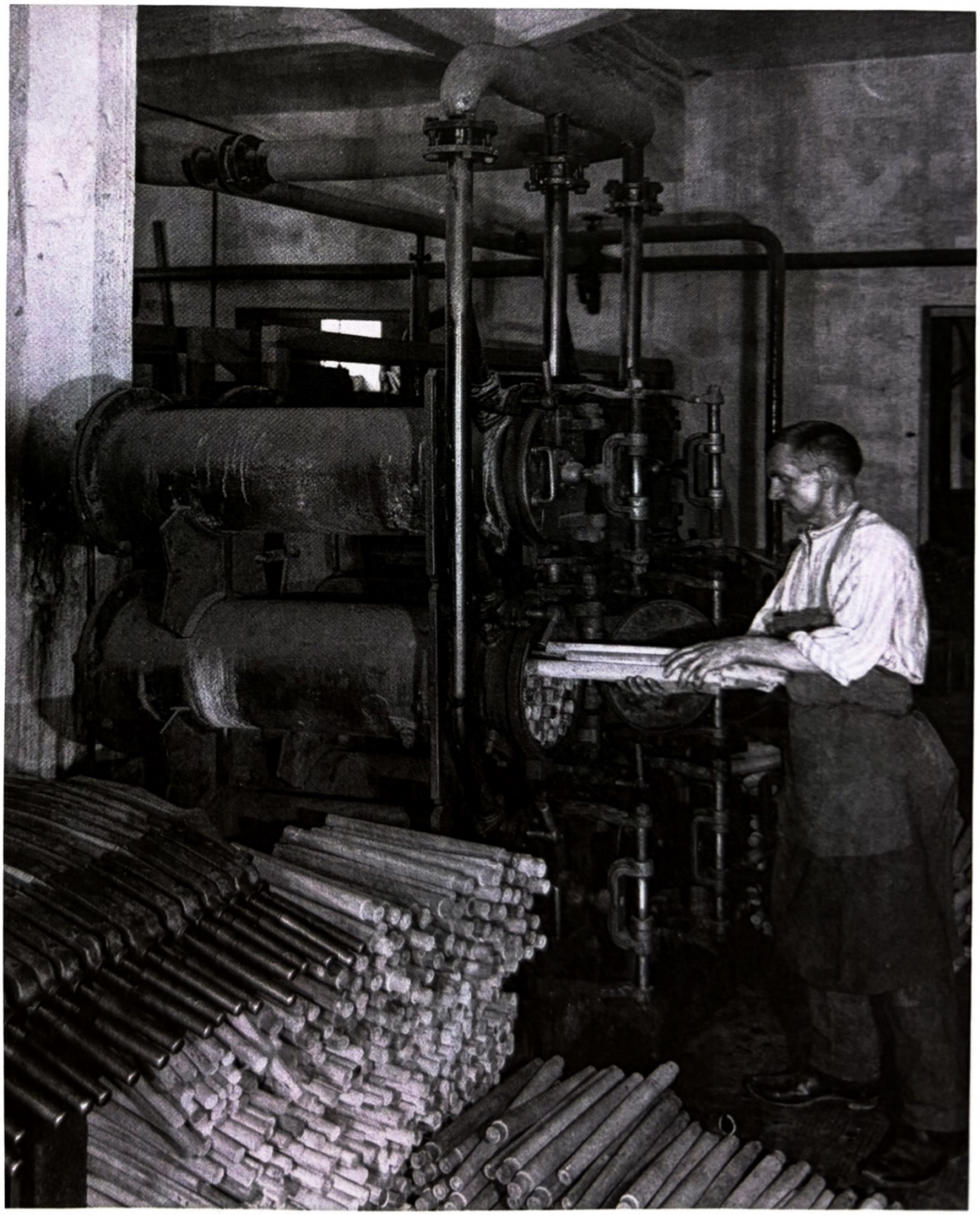
friend Jakob Heinrich in Boppard dated 15 August 1851, we learn that a certain J. Bartl had ordered, in addition to four dozen chairs, also a dozen model No. 4 armchairs for seating at the hotel called "Zur Königin von England" in Pest (Budapest) approximately six months before Anna Daum's order. The second public establishment with this chair was Anna Daum's Café at the corner of Wallnerstraße and Kohlmarkt in Vienna. "[...] in Daum's café at the Kohlmarkt, we have to furnish the front room facing the street in mahogany, namely 4 dozen chairs, 20 benches along the walls, 16 tables, 1 credenza, and several racks, all of this we have to deliver by 10 September, according to the contract."[22]

There were further orders from Budapest and Trieste. At that time, September 1851, Michael Thonet employed eight journeymen and three dayworkers. The workshop was bursting at the seams. "[...] We had to make our entire apartment into a workshop and have so much to do that we had to take up another apartment and also use Sandner's apartment as a workshop."[23] In August 1850, work began on luxury furniture for the 1851 World Fair at Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace in London.

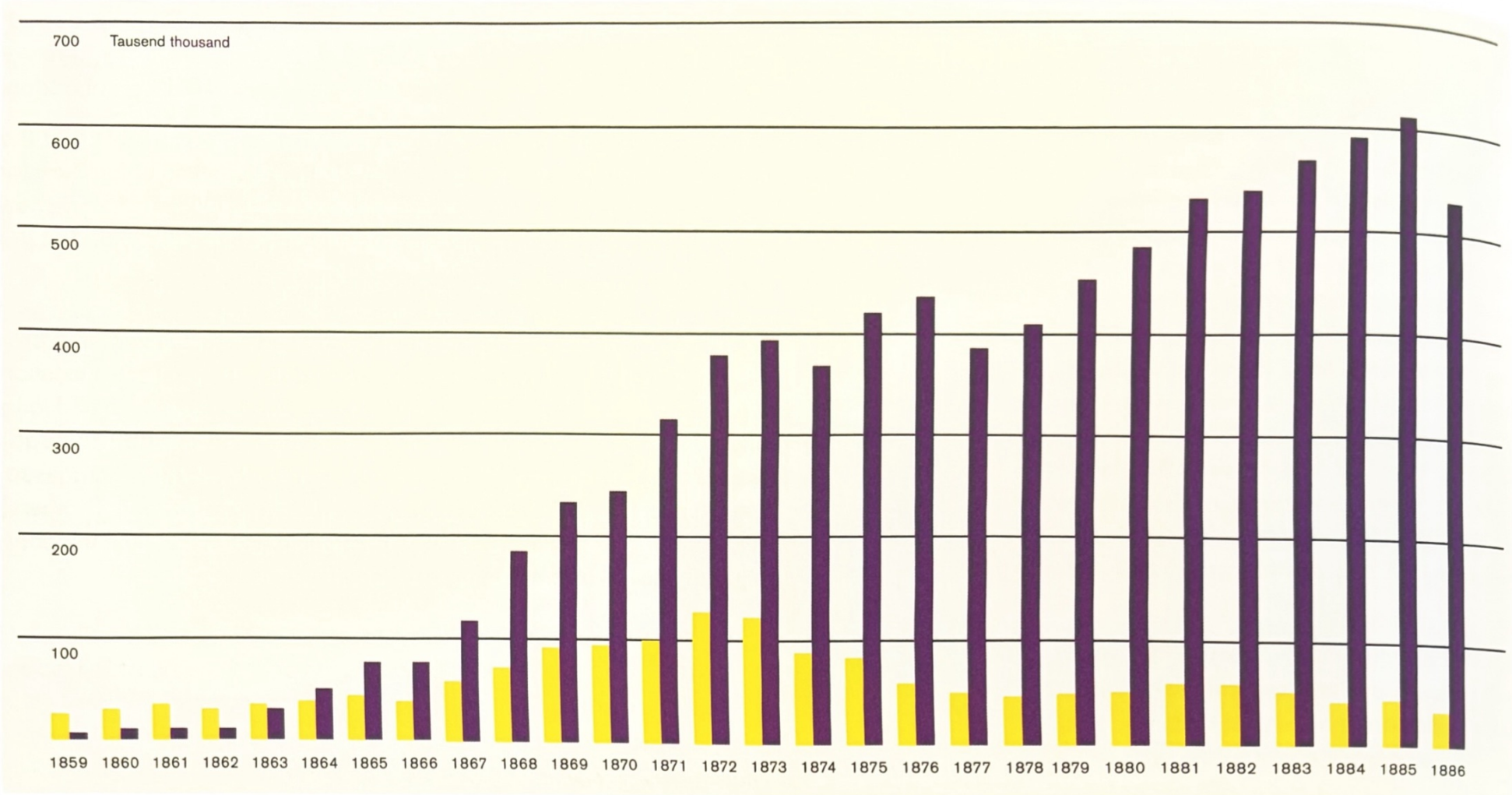
Although it was not yet definitively decided, it was foreseeable that the path would lead in a different direction: To the production of furniture for public places, for apartments, later for the needs of offices and cinemas. Michael Thonet's dream of factory production of high quality and at the same time inexpensive furniture started taking shape.

Demand for this "consumer furniture" increased in such a way, that production and distribution were separated in 1852.[24] The first sales location was opened in the *Palais Montenuovo*.[25] The workshop, which had long since become too small, was moved in the spring of 1853 to larger premises in the former *Mollardmühle* [Mollard Mill], at 173 Mollardgasse. On 1 November 1853, the company Gebrüder Thonet [Thonet Brothers] was founded. A steam engine was purchased and at that time the company employed approximately 40 workers.

22 Letter from 15 August 1851 (see note. 18), quote, 41.
23 Ibid.
24 In addition to the shop which was set up in the Palais Montenuovo on Strauchgasse in 1852 and lasted until 1958, there was another shop on the Jägerzeile (now Praterstraße), which was abandoned in 1861 and replaced by a new branch at Leopoldstadt No. 586.
25 The establishment of the branch is dated with July 1852 in Exner, the commemorative inscription mentions the end of 1852. Cf. Wilhelm Franz Exner, *Das Biegen des Holzes*, Leipzig ⁴1922, 45, and *Michael Thonet, Ein Gedenkblatt aus Anlass der hundertsten Wiederkehr seines Geburtstages 2. Juli 1896, Von seinen Söhnen und Enkeln*, Vienna 1896, 20.



Zylinderförmige Dämpföfen für Vorderfüße, Foto von Herman Bramer, „Lisa“, Werkstätte für Lichtbildtechnik, Wien, 1929 Cylindrical steam ovens for front legs; photo by Herman Bramer, “Lisa,” workshop for photography, Vienna, 1929



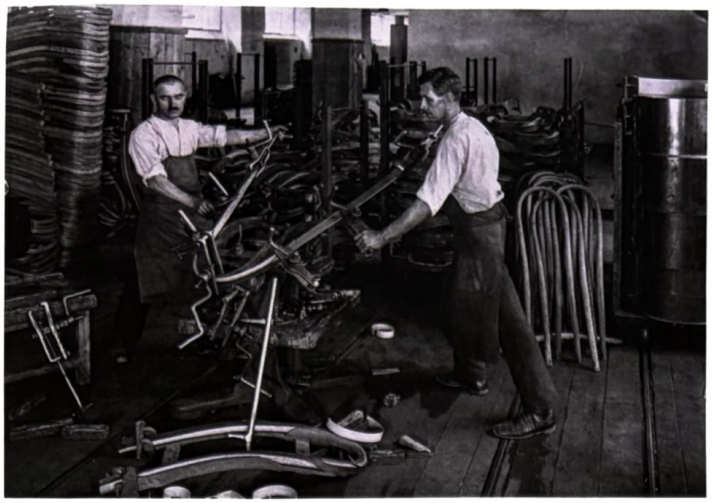
Sessel mit Trapezsitz Chairs with trapezoidal seat

Sessel mit rundem Sitz Chairs with circular seat

27 Exner [4]1922 (wie Anm. 25), 43.

28 Sigfried Giedion, *Die Herrschaft der Mechanisierung. Ein Beitrag zur anonymen Geschichte* (1948), Frankfurt am Main 1982, 535.

29 Gert Selle bezeichnet dies als die „produktionsästhetisch-technologische Grundlage" der Bugholzmöbel. Vgl. ders., *Die Geschichte des Designs in Deutschland von 1870 bis heute*, Köln [3]1981, 18ff.



Biegen von Rücklehnen, Fotos von Herman Bramer, „Lisa", Werkstätte für Lichtbildtechnik, Wien, 1929 Bending of backrests, photos by Herman Bramer, "Lisa," workshop for photography, Vienna, 1929

Industrial Production Starting in 1856

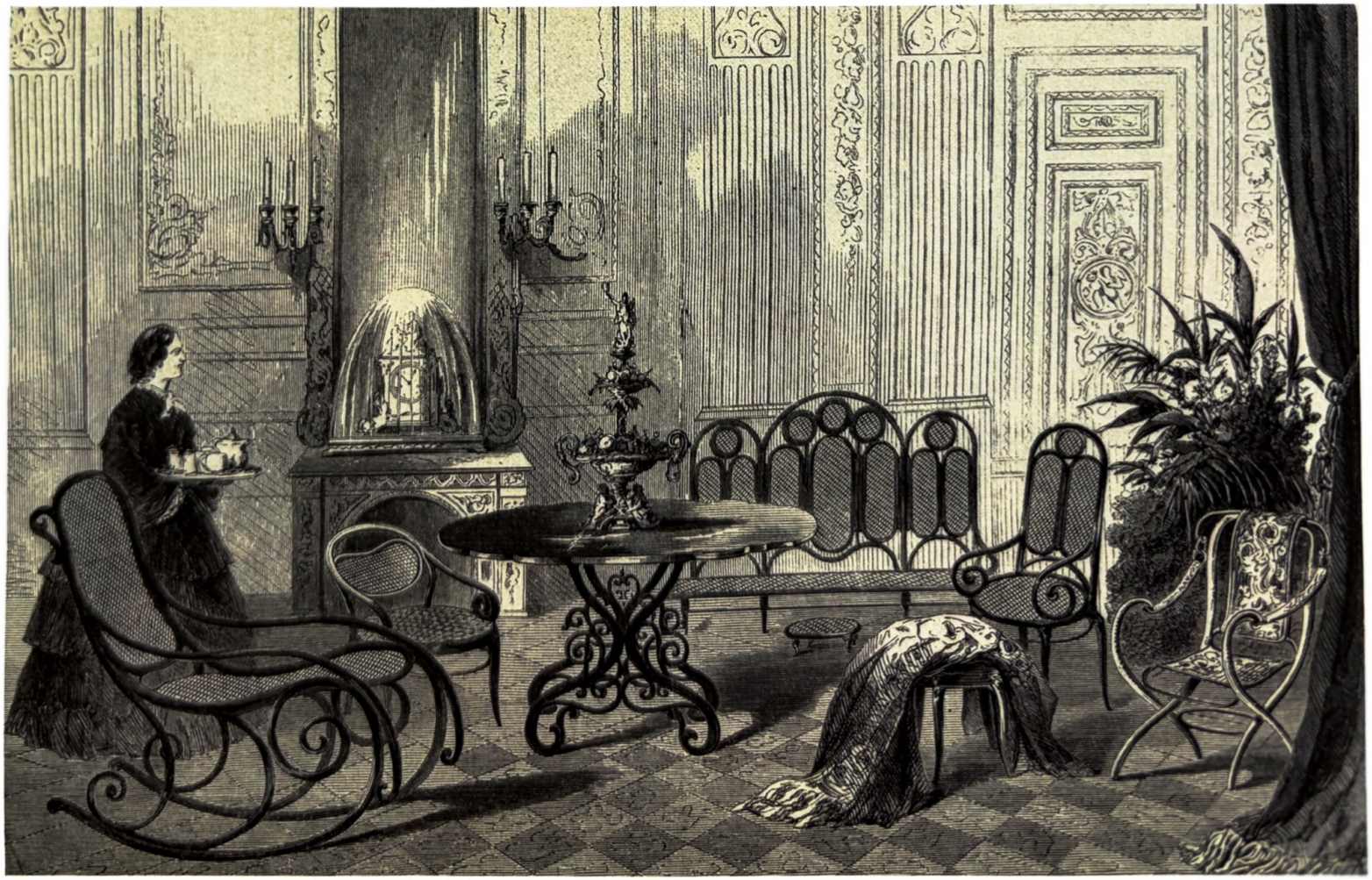
However, it was not the year that the company was founded, but rather the year 1856 which was decisive: In addition to the Thonets being granted Austrian citizenship, the construction of the first factory in Koritschan, Moravia and the granting of the patent for bending solid wood laid the two foundations for the subsequent, unstoppable rise of the Gebrüder Thonet company.

Michael Thonet's goal was always to build high-quality chairs using as few individual pieces as possible, to use identical components for as many applications as possible, and to be able to produce them quickly and *en masse*. With the invention which allowed for the bending of solid wood, he had achieved this goal in the mid-1850s. All of the three-part seat frames as well as the corresponding rear leg/backrest construction were already massively bent, but not yet completely solid, i.e. not yet made from one single piece; this wasn't achieved until the beginning of the 1860s.

The distinction between "solid" and "completely solid" is essential. In the seat frames, three massively curved individual parts were glued after drying to form a very stable construction, an additional layer was placed inside the crest rail for reinforcement of the rear leg/backrest construction, which had already been bent from a single piece. With this method of production, it was believed that one could produce on a large scale and be successful, and the factory in Koritschan was built, because "the Thonet production method requires the use of large-scale production, which must have large, expensive, special equipment in order to be economically significant."[26] The years from 1856 to 1861 were a transitional period during which certain regularities emerged, but also the most varied combinations of components could be found. At the beginning of the 1860s, it was finally possible to produce curved seat frames using one single part.

In the course of five years the great goal was achieved: The creation of completely solid curved components in one single operation. The gluing could be eliminated. Thus, the production of furniture made of bentwood was perfected for factory-based, industrial production. While in a certain sense the development stops here, the success story of a chair that was to conquer the world begins exactly at this point–chair No. 14: "The success story of the Koritschan factory in 1859 was important for the bentwood furniture industry. The creation of the consumer chair No. 14, the

26 Bruno Otto, *Die Entwicklung der mitteleuropäischen Bugholzmöbel-Industrie*, Eberswalde 1931, 14.



„Möbel aus gebogenem Holz“; Illustration aus *Illustrirtes Familien-Journal*, Leipzig und Dresden 1865, 204 “Bentwood furniture”; illustration from *Illustrirtes Familien-Journal*, Leipzig and Dresden 1865, 204

lichen Schwierigkeiten zwar
mäßige Erzeugung optimiert
bleme mit der Stabilität

Die
einzige
k. k. a priv.
Fabrik von
Möbeln aus gebogenem Holze
der
GEBRÜDER THONET in WIEN,
Leopoldstadt Nr. 586, an der Ferdinandsbrücke,
empfiehlt ihr
reichhaltiges Lager
von
Sitz-Möbeln aller Arten.
Indem wir auf unsere bestkonstruirten Schwungfedel von vorzüglicher Façon aufmerksam machen, erlauben wir uns zugleich anzuzeigen, daß seit 15. August 1861 eine bedeutende Preisermäßigung in allen unsern Erzeugnissen eingetreten ist.
913
Nr. 1. — fl. 6.25.
Nr. 3. — fl. 6.50.
Nr. 8. — fl. 8.
Nr. 11. — fl. 11.
Nr. 14. — fl. 8.
Central-Depot für Ungarn: in Pest, Dorotheergasse.

Gebrüder Thonet, Werbeanzeige in *Neueste Nachrichten*, 19. März 1862
Gebrüder Thonet, Advertisement in *Neueste Nachrichten*, 19 March 1862

so-called 'Three Guilder Chair'–the first bentwood chair with a circular seat frame, which has since proceeded to conquer the world with approximately 100 different types of backrests."[27]

What is new as compared to the chairs produced before No. 14? There are three key changes in terms of simplification: The more easy-to-bend circular seat was "invented;" the inner crest rail was no longer spliced into the rear stiles, as in model No. 8, but rather was screwed to it; one dispensed with the capitals on the front legs. The decisive factor is the circular seat frame. While all three-part solid trapezoidal seat rings from this time had the scarf joint on the side, the new circular seat had it at the back. The lateral scarf joint made sense in that with the trapezoidal frames the two sides offered the best possibility for the longest and straightest glue joint possible. With No. 14, however, we now have for the first time a circular seat frame in which there are no more or less suitable areas for the longest possible scarf joint. The bending radius is the same everywhere. Another innovation is the lack of capitals on the front legs, which in turn caused specific problems with the stability, which, however, could be solved over the next few years.

Chair No. 14 is the result of a development in which simplifications in the manufacturing process and formal solutions go hand in hand. It is not only the aesthetic quality of a "form purified by serial production,"[28] but an expression of its own language of form, which is material- and construction-related, comparable to what Gottfried Semper described as a "style," which results from a new material and its processing techniques.[29] A product had been created, a piece of furniture which in this form and using this manufacturing technique was ideally suited for industrial production and which only so could be offered at the unbeatably cheap price of three guilders. It was not without reason that a second factory was built in Bystřice pod Hostýnem, Moravia shortly after the introduction of this model.

How important No. 14 and the subsequent seating furniture with a circular seat frame was for the economic success of Gebrüder Thonet can easily be seen in their sales figures for the years 1859 to 1886. With the invention of the processes and means of production necessary for bending completely solid parts, the fundamental difficulties were resolved, and the production was optimized for factory production, but there were still problems–as already mentioned–with the stability of the chairs. The possibility to increase the strength of the parts to be bent by improving the bending process was certainly suitable for finding a remedy for this situation. Still, by the end of the 1870s, we find a whole host of other measures which were found to make the chairs more stable and durable.

The introduction of the completely solid bent seat frames had exacerbated one problem: That of connecting the front leg with the seat frame. Again and again, there were front legs which either broke off or out; time and again, annoyed customers brought their chairs back to the sales branches because of this. In the autumn of 1861, the decisive breakthrough which categorically solved these problems was made: The invention of the leg ring. The importance of the introduction of this component, which was crucial for the stability of the chair. How much the company was concerned with making improvements in the production of it, is shown by the fact that the Thonets already had press molds in February 1862 with which they could bend two leg rings in one single operational step. "Here the leg rings are cut first and then bent two at a time, which makes things

27 Exner ⁴1922 (see note. 25), 43.
28 Sigfried Giedion, *Die Herrschaft der Mechanisierung. Ein Beitrag zur anonymen Geschichte* [*Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History*] (1948), Frankfurt am Main 1982, 535.
29 Gert Selle calls this the "production-aesthetic-technological basis" of bentwood furniture. Cf. the same, *Die Geschichte des Designs in Deutschland von 1870 bis heute*, Cologne ³1981, 18ff.

Thonet Fabrik in Frankenberg; Foto aus einem Album „Thonet Mundus“, Mitte der 1920er Jahre
Thonet factory in Frankenberg; photo from a “Thonet Mundus” album, mid-1920s

die trapezförmigen Stellen, an denen man eine Art Kon

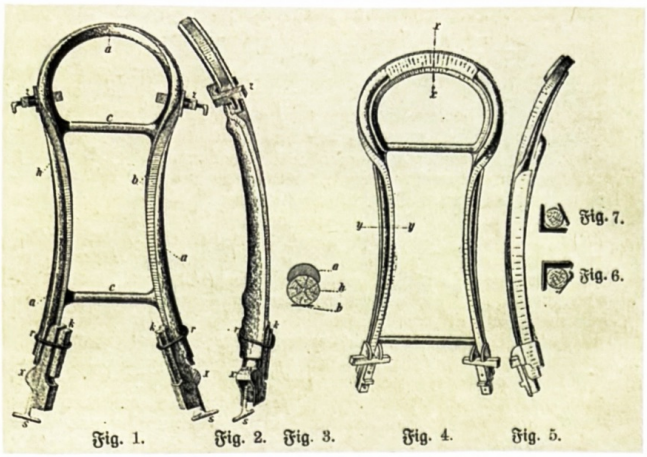


Illustration um 1890: Fig. 1 zeigt eine ältere, Fig. 4 eine neuere Rücklehnpresse; aus Wilhelm Franz Exner, *Das Biegen des Holzes*, Leipzig ⁴1922
Illustration ca. 1890: fig. 1 shows an older, fig. 4 a newer backrest mold; from Wilhelm Franz Exner, *Das Biegen des Holzes*, Leipzig ⁴1922

go more quickly."[30] In July of the same year, the leg rings already had a stronger cross-section than the previous ones. It was repeatedly demanded: "All chairs only with rings." Even already delivered chairs were to be equipped with leg rings, which caused great problems because they did not always fit properly and had to be fitted individually.

The introduction of the leg ring and the resulting increased stability made it possible to simplify, even omit, some of the constructive details, which in turn simplified production and made the chairs cheaper. The discount, which was announced in the *Neueste Nachrichten* on 19 March 1862, is a direct consequence of these technical innovations: "[...] at the same time let us inform you that since 13 August 1861, a significant price reduction has occurred in all our products."

For the front legs, you no longer needed thread mounts to connect them more firmly to the frame, you simply inserted them into it. In the circular seats, the front reinforcing corner blocks could be omitted and in both the circular and trapezoidal frames the attached wooden blocks for stabilizing the seat frame/rear leg connection were no longer necessary. But here, too, there is only a tendency, not a chronological development, which would indicate a systematic approach: There are models which already have a leg ring and yet still have screwed-in front legs; in the No.14 we find strongly dimensioned seat frames, in which one still attached the corner brackets. All the "inconsistencies" are an indication of experiments in this transitional period. Despite the leg rings, they tried to make the connection of the front legs with the frame even more stable, and finally–for the trapezoidal frames–reached a final solution: In the two places where the front legs are inserted into the frame, they left a kind of console that allowed for an increase in the length of the tenon.

Another measure to improve the overall stability of the chair was the introduction of reinforcing wooden braces.[31] In the catalogs these are also called "connections made of curved wood" or simply "connecting arms." They were fastened with two screws each to the outside of the seat and to the rear stiles and thus effectively stabilized the seat frame/rear leg connection. These reinforcing braces were shown for the first time on an illustration of the chair No. 16, which Gebrüder Thonet presented at the 1876 World Fair in Philadelphia. At the end of the 1870s, the chairs were stable enough, and in the following decades there were minor improvements in the design of the classic chairs, but no more fundamental changes.

When Michael Thonet died in Vienna on 3 March 1871, there were already three factories, all with numerous suppliers of their own. The production facilities in Koritschan (Koryčany; 1856), Bistritz am Hostein (Bystřice pod Hostýnem; 1861), Groß-Ugrócz (1866), Hallenkau (Halenkov; 1868) and Wsetin (Vsetín; 1872), were established with the supply of wood available in those areas in mind, while in the founding of the factories in Nowo Radomsk (1880) and Frankenberg (1889) these factors as well as trade considerations played a decisive role. Russia and Germany had imposed import duties on goods coming into the country to protect their own industry. In order to preserve these markets, Gebrüder Thonet founded its own factories in these countries.

30 Franz Thonet, Letter from 16 February 1862 sent to Vienna; Copy from Archiv Thillmann.
31 These angles are obviously not an "invention" of Gebrüder Thonet. In a patent application from Henry I Seymour "Improvement in the Construction of Chairs" from 1870, angles of this kind can already be found in drawings. Thonet's connecting arms, on the other hand, were not introduced until the mid-1870s. Cf. Barry R. Harwood, "Two Early Thonet Imitators in the United States," in: *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Fall 1994), The University of Chicago Press, 95.

Niederlage der Gebrüder Thonet in Budapest; Foto aus einem Album „Thonet Mundus“, Mitte der 1920er Jahre Gebrüder Thonet sales branch in Budapest; photo from a “Thonet Mundus” album, mid-1920s

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Deckblatt des Verkaufskatalogs von 1879
Cover page of the sales catalog from 1879

Sales and Branches 1860–1875

Parallel to the founding of new factories, a perfectly organized branch and distribution system which permanently secured sales was set up in the 1860s. The separation of production and sales, which had already been implemented with the opening of the showroom in Palais Montenuovo, was systematically continued. The aim was to keep the product in their own hands, from the development through manufacturing to sales.

Pest [now Budapest] was the first city outside of Vienna, in which a separate branch was established. In the summer of 1861 Franz Thonet traveled there and took care of the acquisition of appropriate premises and the establishment of a branch. A suitable space was found in *Lika House* at 3-303 Dorottya utca. In mid-October the branch was opened.

The establishment of the London branch should be seen in connection with the "International Exhibition" of 1862. It was obvious that the participation in the exhibition and the simultaneous opening of a branch was planned in order to make Gebrüder Thonet more well-known in England.[32] In the spring, Franz traveled to London and found rooms for rent in one of the best locations in London, 16 Ludgate Hill; cheap rooms for three years for the time being. In addition to presenting the furniture at the World Fair, the Thonets also provided the seating for the exhibition's restaurants, because they were convinced this promised to have an even greater advertising effect than the exhibition itself. "We have 8 dozen of each of these numbers [chair No. 3, No. 11, and No. 14 finely woven, and No. 11 and No. 14 coarsely woven] in the four best rooms of the exhibition restaurant. [...] This is worth more than the rest of the exhibition and the sales branch together. Everyone sees the chairs and will think they are strong, and this will greatly enhance our future here and in Paris."[33]

This was followed by the founding of further sales branches in Brno, Berlin, Hamburg, Amsterdam, and Paris. Already in 1873, they crossed the Great Pond: They opened their own shop at 808 Broadway in New York; Milan followed in 1876, Moscow in 1884, Marseille and Barcelona in 1887 and 1888, respectively. By 1890, another 26 shops were established at prime locations in all major cities. Since not all furniture could be held in the branches, they started producing posters on which most of the models were displayed in the end of the 1850s.

In the first few years furniture was used mainly to furnish public businesses such as cafés, restaurants, and later also offices, but in the following decades the range was extended to include home furnishings. However, the limited scope of a poster could no longer accommodate the large number of different types of furniture. Therefore to give the customer an almost complete overview of the production, a *Musteralbum* [Sample Album] was published for the first time. The number of furniture models presented was 155. Later there were steadily more extensive, partly multilingual catalogs from which the customers could choose not only their furniture, but also the variations in color and shape themselves. In addition to an increasingly large variety of models, Gebrüder Thonet then tried to introduce bentwood furniture to all areas of life. Special catalogs with furniture for theaters, restaurants, hospitals, gardens, and verandas appeared. In a catalog called *Lawn-Tennis* everything necessary for this game was offered. The *Gesamtkatalog* [Complete catalog] from 1911 with the supplement from 1915 ultimately contained more than 2000 different bentwood furniture items and variants of basic models.

32 Furniture from Gebrüder Thonet was offered in London as early as 1860. Letters from 1860 to 1862 mention deliveries to a company called Ingelbach & Wolffgang, at 6 Lilypot Lane, Gresham Street. This company also had a shop in Paris–66, rue de Bondy–in the early 1860s in which Gebrüder Thonet furniture could be purchased.

33 Franz Thonet, Letter from 18 April 1862 sent to Koritschan; Copy from Archiv Thillmann.

Außenbestuhlung mit Gartensessel Nr. 4, Restaurant mit Damenkapelle im Prater, Wien; Foto vermutlich von Emil Mayer, um 1905–1910 Outdoor seating with garden chair No. 4, restaurant with women's orchestra in Prater, Vienna; photo presumably by Emil Mayer, 1905–1910

Erweiterung der P

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system aufgebaut hatte

Expansion of the Product Range 1875–1900

After having set up a perfect sales and branch system in the 1860s and having made the furniture more stable and usable through a number of constructive measures, the model range was continuously expanded, starting in the mid-1870s. In addition to furniture that showed how expertly bending technology had in the meantime been mastered, the taste of the times demanded new models for an increasingly ambitious and affluent bourgeoisie. Especially in Vienna, the "Ringstraße Architecture" proved to be the leading influence on interior design. There should no longer be the "lean rods,"[34] but rather historicizing forms incised, preferably bronzed, to give the furniture a richer appearance.

Gebrüder Thonet could also not escape these developments. Their furniture also followed the taste of the times, imitating styles–Neo-Gothic, Neo-Baroque–but not in itself style-forming. The decline of such historicizing forms in production can be observed in the early 1880s. Chairs and armchairs with turned front legs appear for the first time in the supplement to the catalog from 1883. Starting in that same year, they produced a model called "Gothic Form," stylistically modeled after the set from the 1862 World Fair, Model No. 16.[35]

The work of August Thonet, Michael's third son, who ran the factory in Bystřice from 1869 to 1890, falls into this time of rather "dubious" new creations. Under his management Bystřice became the Thonet's most productive factory and the starting point for technical and design innovations.[36] Thanks to his technical-constructive understanding we have a number of innovative pieces of furniture, unique experimental pieces that were too far ahead of their time to be commercially successful. Although there is no evidence of August Thonet's authorship of these models, they were created under his direction and participation in Bystřice.

Already for the 1867 World Fair in Paris he designed a model known today as the "Demonstration Chair," which showed the possibilities of bending wood in a most impressive way: From only two wooden rods which were several meters long, he designed a chair which was then presented at every exhibition in which the Thonets participated. Models 51 and 91 are most likely to have been produced under his direction, as was the rocking sofa No. 7500, which many consider the most elegant bentwood design.

Model No. 51 is more reminiscent of an iron construction than a wooden chair. Like chair No. 14, this model consists of only six parts that are "braced" together to achieve incredible stability.[37] Model No. 91 answered another question: How much can one reduce the cross-section of components while still ensuring that the chair is sufficiently stable? The constructively essential parts of this model have an oval cross-section, with their thickness corresponding to about half of the longer side of the oval.

In addition to these designs, new models were also introduced to the market, models which were rooted in the tradition of the No. 14 and contrasted pleasantly with the historicizing furniture. This included the No. 18 chair first produced in 1876, which also consists of only six parts and was available in different variations. Finally, the model No. 56, which was verifiably available as of 1883 and offered on the market as of 1885, was

34 Jakob von Falke, *Die Kunst im Hause*, Vienna 1873, 287.

35 Cf. Eva B. Ottillinger (Ed.), *Gebrüder Thonet, Möbel aus gebogenem Holz*, Vienna i.a. 2003, therein: Thonet Sales Catalog 1885, 130.

36 In 1876, with a total production of 585 255 pieces of furniture in all four factories, 250 758 were produced at the Bystřice factory alone. (Koryčany: 153 236, Groß-Ugrócz: 98 367, Vsetín: 82 894). The total number of workers in December 1876 was 3 567, of which 1 455 were employed in Bystřice. They produced goods with a gross value of fl. 2,328,877, of which Bystřice accounts for fl. 976,682. Thanks to Heimo Keindl for providing appropriate archival material.

37 The problem of connecting the front legs with the seat frame has been solved here–quite comparable to the Boppard chairs–in that there are no more conventional front legs.

Einrichtungen von Innenräumen mit Bugholzmöbeln
Furnishing of interior with bentwood furniture:

Café Weisser Hirsch in Leipzig; Postkarte von 1915
Café Weisser Hirsch in Leipzig; postcard from 1915

Hotel-Restaurant Britannia in Langenschwalbach (Untertaunus); postcard, ca. 1925 *Hotel-Restaurant Britannia* in Langenschwalbach (Untertaunus); postcard, ca. 1925

Einrichtungen von Innenräumen mit Bugholzmöbeln
Furnishing of interior with bentwood furniture:

Speisesaal im Kurhaus Marienberg, Boppard; Postkarte, um 1910
Dining room in the Kurhaus Marienberg, Boppard; postcard, ca. 1910

Kaffeehaus in St. Pauli, Hamburg; Postkarte von 1926
Café in St. Pauli, Hamburg; postcard from 1926

the first chair whose rear legs, stiles and crest rail did not consist of a single continuous beech rod of approximately 220 centimeters in length. The rear stiles are connected at the top with a crossbar, so that the maximum length of the required wood shortens to about 90 centimeters. This construction increased the economic efficiency, as now shorter rods could be used. In the following years, this design was a model for a variety of models, which, as of 1888, received the thermoplastic molded "seats" and/or "backrests."

Plywood

These "seats and backrests" were components made of plywood, with whose production the company began in 1877: "Of greatest importance was production of initially glued, perforated veneer wood seats, the production of which started in the Groß-Ugrócz factory in 1877 [...]."[38] The beginning of production correlates with Franz Thonet's visit to the World Fair in Philadelphia in 1876. The company Gardner, which had obtained a patent for the production of chair seats from cross-glued veneers in 1872, showed their models there, and it is likely that it was there, at the latest, that Franz Thonet was introduced to the use of plywood for chair seats.[39] In the following years, Gebrüder Thonet increasingly used this material, mainly for seating furniture. While the catalogs from 1879 and 1883 show only model No. 18 with the plywood seat and backrest, in the subsequent years one finds this material in an increasing number of models.

The enormous importance of the introduction of veneer seats is made evident by the company's history. It says about the further development, that: "These veneer seats have very quickly made their entrance and have to a large extent gradually displaced the caned seats, so that in 1914 about 60% of the chairs produced were provided with wooden seats."[40] At an industry conference of bentwood furniture producers, it was finally stipulated "that sales of caned goods were not allowed in Czechoslovakia due to an almost complete lack of cane material."[41]

While the first plywood seats and backrests were often perforated, using predominantly symmetrical-geometric patterns, it ultimately became possible to "imprint" the desired style on the furniture by using the necessary procedures: In the time of Historicism, with motifs which gave the furniture a "gothic" or "renaissance-like" feel; after 1900, with floral motifs from the formal repertoire of Art Nouveau. At the beginning of the 20th century, a more geometric repertoire of forms was also offered. Frequently, the so-called "stripe pattern" was found on the plywood seats, either relief-like or as a *branddessin* [burnt-in patterns]. Gebrüder Thonet wasn't the only company to use the new material, the other bentwood furniture manufacturers also used it, among others, Thonet's largest competitor, J. & J. Kohn, which took on the leading role in this sector at around 1900. Ultimately, they all recognized the economic potential implied by which the formal renewal of bentwood furniture in the context of the so-called *Wiener Kunstfrühling* [Vienna's Artistic Renewal]. At the turn of the cen-

38 Exner [4]1922 (see note. 25), 43.

39 It is often claimed that Gebrüder Thonet invented the plywood seats at the same time as the American company Gardner, "We would like to mention that the veneer seats were invented almost simultaneously by Thonet and Gardner in New York, as documented in the highly interesting patent dispute of 1880, in which Gardner's patent had to be annulled because Thonet could prove that his patent had been approved first." (Ernst Pliwa, *Die industrielle Verwertung des Rothbuchenholzes: Eine Denkschrift*, edited by a commission set up by the Austro-Hungarian Association of Wood Producers, Wood Traders and Wood Industrialists and the Technological Trade Museum, Vienna 1884, 29). Thonet never filed a claim regarding a patent against Gardner, and the annulment of Gardner's patent had to do with a lawsuit against Herz and others, in which all of Gardner's claims for patent infringement were ultimately dismissed. Cf. Thillmann 2018 (see note. 8), 85–91.

40 Exner [4]1922 (see note 25), 43.

41 Letter from Dr. Richard Thonet to Alfred Thonet from 29.1.1920. Participants in this meeting were Dr. Richard Thonet along with some directors on behalf of Gebrüder Thonet, Ernst Hirsch on behalf of Fischel and Leopold Pilzer on behalf of Mundus; Archiv Heimo Keindl.

Herstellung von Sperrholzplatten in der Fabrik Bistritz am Hostein, Foto von Herman Bramer, „Lisa“, Werkstätte für Lichtbildtechnik, Wien, 1929
Production of plywood panels in the factory in Bystřice pod Hostýnem; photo by Herman Bramer, “Lisa,” Workshop for photography, Vienna, 1929

Herstellung der Muster der Prägeplatten für Sperrholzsitze und -rücken; Foto von Herman Bramer, „Lisa“ Werkstätte für Lichtbildtechnik, Wien, 1929
Production of samples of embossing plates for plywood seats and backrests; photo by Herman Bramer, “Lisa,” Workshop for photography, Vienna, 1929

tury, Viennese architects such as Adolf Loos, Josef Hoffmann, and Otto Wagner had their designs carried out by this manufacturer, not Gebrüder Thonet. They discovered new expressions of curved wood and focused on its original qualities. As early as 1899, Kohn hired the young Gustav Siegel as head of the company's own design office. At the 1900 World Fair in Paris, the company's new furniture was presented to an international audience for the first time in an interior design concept also designed by Siegel–while at the same exhibition Gebrüder Thonet tried to free itself from "the intricate bentwood scrubs of historicism"[42] with Windsor armchairs, under the title "*Moderne Fauteuils nach englischem Originale*" [Modern Armchairs after the English Originals].[43]

Sperrholzsitze und -rücken; Gebrüder Thonet, Verkaufskatalog 1905
Plywood seats and backrests; Gebrüder Thonet, sales catalog 1905

42 Sebastian Hackenschmidt, "Zwischen den Stühlen. Zu den Möbeln von Adolf Krischanitz," in: Edelbert Köb (Ed.), *Adolf Krischanitz, das Inventar ist das Ergebnis der Inventur*, Vienna 2016, 51–90: 68.

43 The pioneering role of J. & J. Kohn, both technologically and in terms of design, is emphasized in all contemporary publications. Cf. (no author), "Bugholzmöbel als Stilmöbel im Rahmen moderner Architektur und Interieurs," in: *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft österreichischer Architekten,* Vienna 1900, 69–72: 71.

Jiří Uhlíř

Thonet 1900–1939: Innovation and Crisis

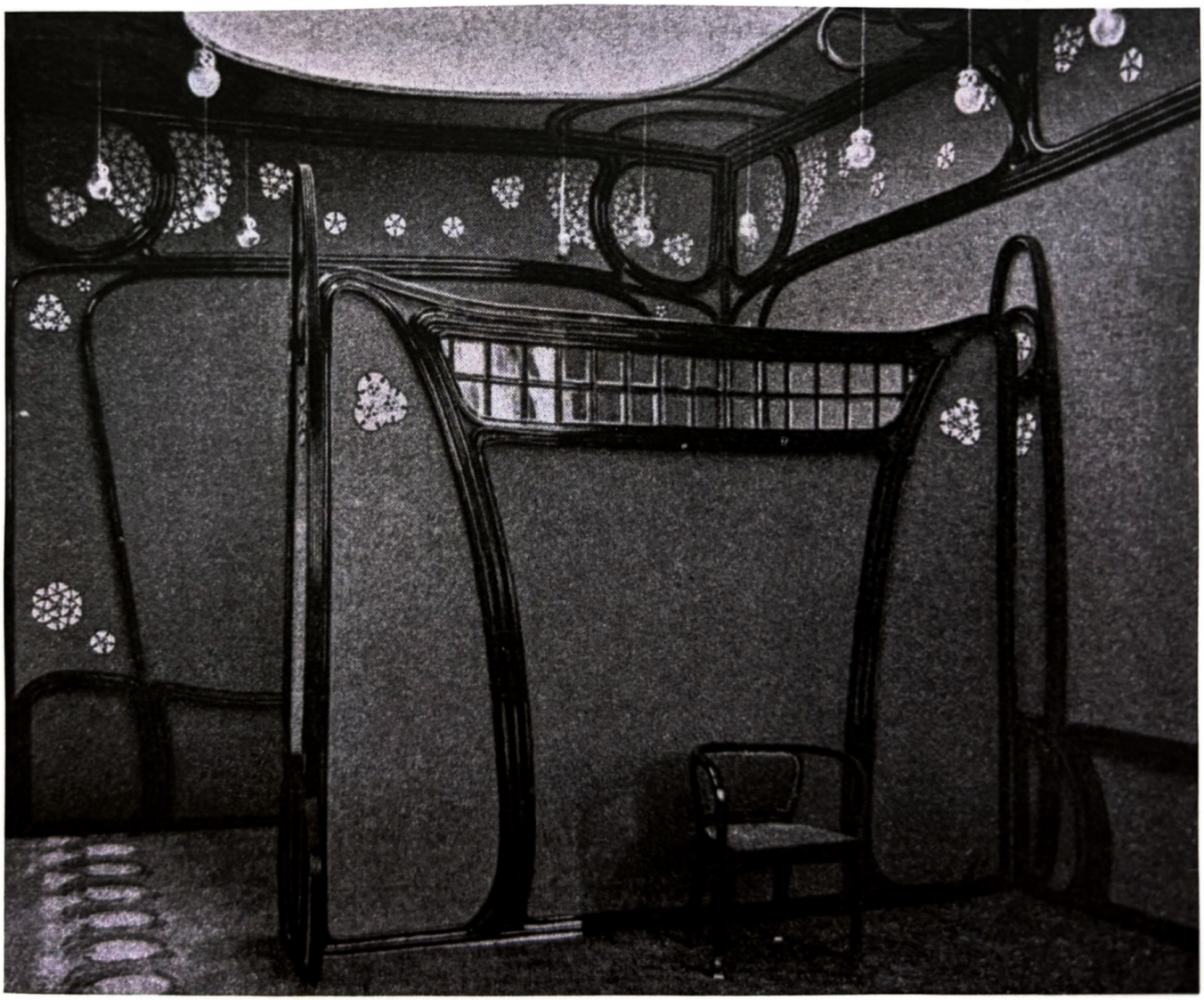
Bentwood Furniture from Architects: Vienna ca. 1900

Although the last quarter of the 19th century could be described economically as a golden age for the Thonet company, even before the turn of the century there was a need to renew the design vocabulary of the furniture and to adapt it to the taste of the times. It seemed hardly possible to continue to exist on the market by only varying the backrests. This could also not be changed by the new types of chairs from the Classical Series II which had been produced since 1883 and had been first published in the catalog from 1885, not even with their successful model No. 56: In contrast to the Classical Series I, with the continuous curved backrests, the new series now had a crossbar connecting the rear stiles; therefore only two-dimensional parts were needed which could all be bent by machines.

It was Adolf Loos–at that time "a not too well-known Viennese architect"[1]–who, in 1898, was able to demonstrate with his furnishings for the Café Museum that bentwood furniture was still capable of development in terms of form, and who thus initiated the prelude to a series of curved "architectural furniture". He was followed, among others, by Josef Hoffmann, Koloman Moser, Gustav Siegel, Marcel Kammerer, Otto Prutscher as well as Otto Wagner as the most famous Austrian architect of his time. While Gebrüder Thonet and J. & J. Kohn worked together with some architects only once, other architects created a variety of models, such as Hoffmann did with Kohn and Prutscher with Thonet.[2] The greatest problem with the attribution is the fact that the two companies did not publish the names of the designers–which prompted the author Karl Kraus to ask the smug question whether the furniture designs would be decided upon at "the company board meetings?"[3] Since the search for the corresponding documents in the archives and estates usually remains unsuccessful, contemporary art magazines and exhibition catalogs, which are not always reliable, are the only sources which can be used in most cases. Negligent authors and the art market have played a dubious part in attribution without concrete evidence: A piece of furniture by Hoffmann–quite naturally everything that has squares–sells better than an anonymous design and, in case of doubt, also enhances a publication.

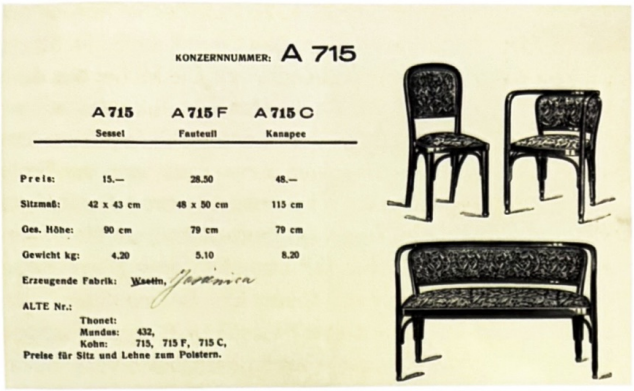
In view of Adolf Loos' furnishings for the Café Museum, Felix Kohn was the first to understand that the crisis in the design of bentwood furniture could be solved only by professional designers. He soon came in contact

1 (No author), *Kunstgewerbeblatt XIII*, Vienna 1902, 211.
2 Cf. Jiří Uhlíř, *Vom Wiener Stuhl zum Architektenmöbel. Jacob & Josef Kohn, Thonet und Mundus Bugholzmöbel vom Secessionismus bis zur Zwischenkriegsmoderne*, Vienna a.o. 2009, 160ff.
3 Cf. Karl Kraus, *Die Fackel*, Issue 89, 3rd year. December 1901, 23.



Gustav Siegel: Messestand von J. & J. Kohn auf der Weltausstellung in Paris 1900; aus: *Das Interieur* I/1900, 156 Gustav Siegel: J. & J. Kohn fair booth at the World Fair in Paris 1900; in: *Das Interieur* I/1900, 156

chitekter
dem glei
für Wag
1903


KONZERNNUMMER: A 715

	A 715 Sessel	A 715 F Fauteuil	A 715 C Kanapee
Preis:	15.–	28.50	48.–
Sitzmaß:	42 x 43 cm	48 x 50 cm	115 cm
Ges. Höhe:	90 cm	79 cm	79 cm
Gewicht kg:	4.20	5.10	8.20

Erzeugende Fabrik: ~~Waeth.~~ Jacob & Josef Kohn

ALTE Nr.:

Thonet:
Mundus: 432,
Kohn: 715, 715 F, 715 C,

Preise für Sitz und Lehne zum Polstern.

Karteikarte für die Garnitur A 715, um 1925, Entwurf Gustav Siegel, 1900
Index card for the A 715, ca. 1925, set design Gustav Siegel, 1900

with Josef Hoffmann, who in turn entrusted his student Gustav Siegel with the execution of the company stand at the 1900 World Fair in Paris–with surprisingly great success.[4] Then other "spatial artists" also discovered the opportunity to give the bentwood furniture a new aesthetic quality, whereby the difficult practical implementation was reserved for the technicians. The associated effort and higher price seemed to be of secondary importance for Kohn, because the company had long dreamed of a clientele who could afford expensive salon furniture.

Thus, in the first years of the 20th century–as it were, a legacy of Loos, who had given the impetus to it–there was a veritable boom of architect's bentwood furniture which Otto Wagner was also involved in with his furnishings for the Dispatch Office of *Die Zeit* and the Austrian Postal Savings Bank shortly after the turn of the century. However, it seems as if the proportion of the work done by the Wagner student Marcel Kammerer was greater than has generally been assumed, because we find related motifs, which were executed using the same technical principle in the models of both architects–the teacher, as well as the student. Although the bentwood furniture for Wagner's Dispatch Office of 1902 and the Austrian Postal Savings Bank of 1903–06 were produced under the auspices of the master, they obviously relied entirely on Marcel Kammerer as the executive designer. Perhaps that is why no new bentwood model was designed when the building of the Postal Savings Bank was extended in 1910–Wagner's specialist Kammerer had already set up his own business.[5]

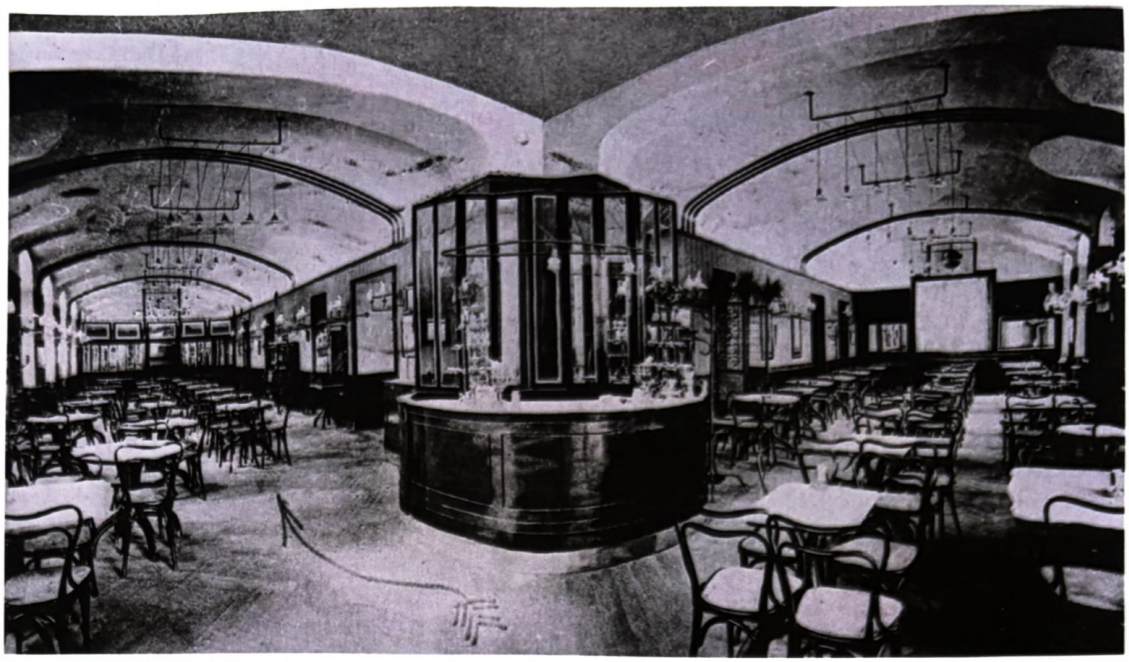
The architect Josef Hoffmann proved to be perhaps the most versatile designer in the field of modern bentwood furniture. A large number of his bentwood furniture designs were presented in 1908, the year of the emperor's anniversary, at the great *Kunstschau* in Vienna, which was held from the beginning of June to mid-November by "the so-called Klimt Group"–"a loose association of artists under the leadership of Gustav Klimt who had left the Vienna Secession due to artistic and financial disputes with their fellow artists."[6] One of the most interesting parts of this exhibition event was the "Small Country House," which was furnished by Hoffmann and the Kohn company and made it impressively clear that modern bentwood furniture could be used not only to furnish individual rooms but also entire houses: "The house was one of the attractions at the art show. It consisted of a loggia, a hall, and five rooms and was available for the amazingly low price of 7,000 crowns."[7]

The overwhelming majority of the furniture presented by Hoffmann at the art show were new pieces: first and foremost, the so-called *Siebenkugelstuhl* [Seven Ball Chair] No. 31 with its matching armchair and settee, Nos. 371 F and 371 C, respectively.[8] Chair No. 396 and armchair No. 397 F stood in the smoking room. The chair from the bedroom was also new but did not end up being part of serial production. We even know the colors from the set presented in the garden, which can be found in the garden furniture catalog under No. 28, in the US catalog of 1911 under No. US 4020: The frame white, the rods green, the balls black. The furniture from the octagonal children's room in the tower of the displayed country house were also still to be found in the Kohn company's catalogs after the First World War; seen commercially, they were probably the most successful bentwood furniture pieces from those

4 Gustav Siegel was really still a "student"–He was almost 20 years old.
5 Cf. Uhlíř 2009 (see note 2), 142–157.
6 Markus Kristan, *Kunstschau Wien 1908*, Weitra 2016, 9.
7 Markus Kristan, "'Sie herrscht, indem sie dient.' Die Architektur der Kunstschau Wien 1908," in: Exhib. Cat. Vienna/Munich, a.o. 2008: *Gustav Klimt und die Kunstschau 1908*, 64. The accompanying footnote explains: "According to the Central Statistical Office, a crown was worth Euro 5.08 in 2008." Ibid., 68.
8 First offered in the Kohn catalog from 1909.

Otto Wagner: Sitzungssaal der Österreichischen Postsparkasse, Wien 1904–06; aus *Das Interieur* VIII/1907, 48 Otto Wagner: Boardroom of the Austrian Postal Savings Bank, Vienna 1904–06; in *Das Interieur* VIII/1907, 48

saß. Wie es die *Neue*
Tatsache, daß die Aktie
die Bugholzmöbeltech
artikeln bekannt war, a



Adolf Loos: Café Museum, Wien 1899; zeitgenössische Postkarte
Adolf Loos: Café Museum, Vienna 1899; contemporary postcard

presented by Hoffmann in 1908.[9] Only three exhibited models–armchair No. 670 which later became known as the *Sitzmaschine* [Sitting Machine], armchair No. 421, and the white-painted veranda variation of the so-called *Fledermausstuhl* (named after the Cabaret Fledermaus) No. 729–were already known.

The presence of the Hoffmann furniture designs at the 1908 Kunstschau made it abundantly clear that the Kohn company had a clear lead in artistically designed bentwood furniture when compared to the, at that time, far more conservative Thonet company–and when compared to designers like Kammerer and Prutscher. As the daily *Neue Freie Presse* put it: "It is a well-known fact that it was the Jacob & Josef Kohn Company which brought the bentwood furniture technique, which up till then was known from only a few nice mass-produced articles, to an unprecedented peak, yes, one technique which one can rightly speak of as a relevant artistic style. The path from the chair made of curved wood to the works of modern furniture architecture produced with bentwood technology, as seen in the *Kunstschau*, was a step as far as that from the thatched farmer's hut to the New English country residence."[10]

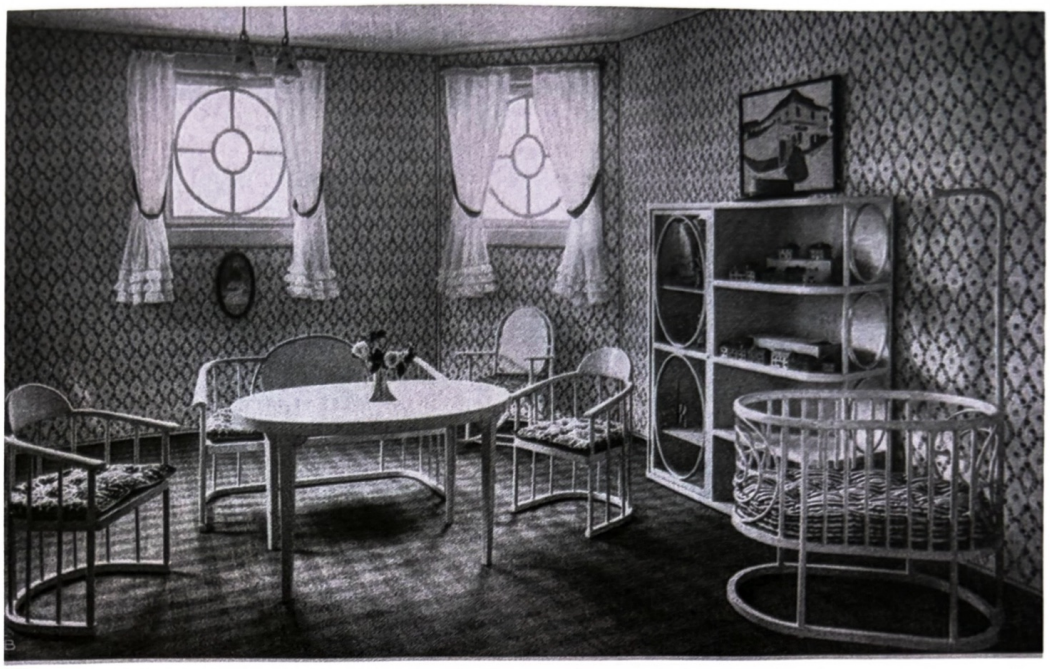
The Situation in the Interwar Period

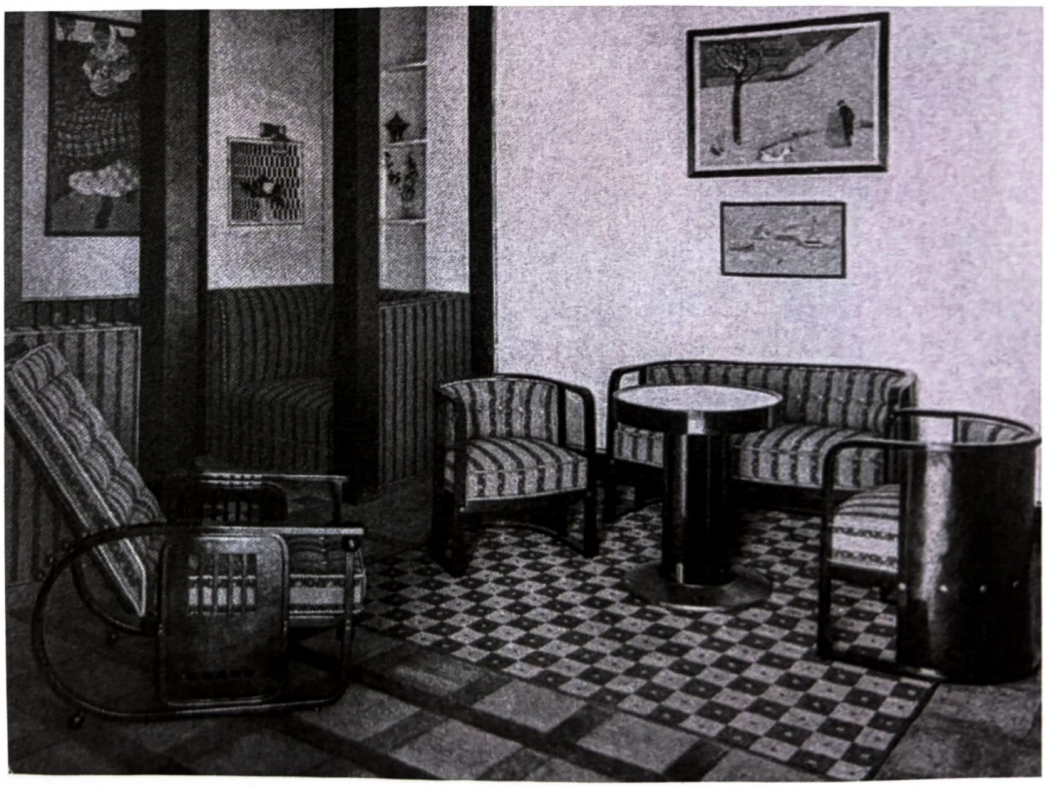
The general enthusiasm for war and the confidence in achieving a quick victory which initially prevailed in Austria was also reflected in the activities of the Thonet company at the beginning of the First World War. The last pre-war catalog from 1911 was complemented by an extensive supplement in 1915. Everything seemed to be running "as usual," new models were developed in the workshop and published in the *Gebrüder Thonet'scher Zentral-Anzeiger* [Gebrüder Thonet's Central Journal]. Only "enemy" French disappeared from the originally bilingual publication starting from issue No. 41.[11] In September 1915, the *Zentral-Anzeiger* announced the creation of an adjustable upholstery frame meant espe-

9 In addition to bentwood furniture, box furniture made by Kohn, which was partly made of plywood, was also shown here. Early on, the company realized that the so-called thermoplastic plywood was suitable not only for filling seats and backrests, but also for box furniture. Therefore, in 1890, the last Kohn factory started operating in Holešov, where primarily veneer and plywood production still take place to this day.

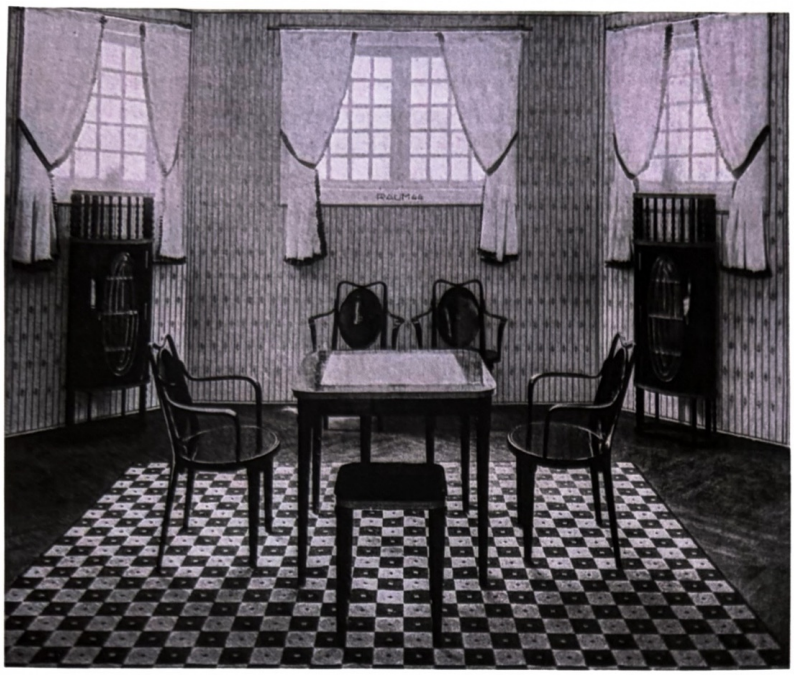
10 (No author), "Die Bilanz der Kunstschau," in: *Neue Freie Presse*, 15 November 1908, 14.

11 Cf. *Gebrüder Thonet'scher Zentral-Anzeiger* (*ZA*) No. 41, 1 June 1914.





Josef Hoffmann: Kinderzimmer (oben) und Halle (unten) im Kleinen Landhaus, Kunstschau 1908, Wien; aus: *Die Kunst* X/18/1908, 540/541
Josef Hoffmann: Child's bedroom (above) and hall (below) in a small country home, Kunstschau 1908, Vienna; in: *Die Kunst* X/18/1908, 540/541



Josef Hoffmann: Rauchzimmer im Kleinen Landhaus, Kunstschau 1908, Wien; aus: *Moderne Bauformen* VII/1908, 371 Josef Hoffmann: Smoking room in a small country home, Kunstschau 1908, Vienna; in: *Moderne Bauformen* VII/1908, 371

cially for hospitals[12]–or were they already meant for the battlefield hospitals. Issue No. 59 from 1916 then announced a general price increase of 25%.[13] The war-related delays in payment caused an increasing amount of difficulties for Thonet. In 1917, the company was dealt a major blow by the Communist Revolution in Russia, which thwarted any hope of large stocks being returned. A post-war inventory recorded stocks in Moscow (still in pre-war crowns) at 250,000 crowns, in St. Petersburg at 180,000 crowns, and in Odessa at 500,000 crowns–a total of almost one million crowns, therefore, more than the stocks in the whole of Western Europe combined.[14] In the United States, however, significant stocks could be saved successfully thanks to the Thonet's relationship to the Wanner family.

After the war, the situation of the bentwood furniture industry itself seemed completely hopeless: The Austro-Hungarian monarchy had disintegrated into successor states, which had caused the individual companies, factories, and businesses to move abroad seemingly overnight. Although production rose again, in 1921, it still hadn't yet reached the level of pre-war production again: 594 442 chairs were sold in 1913, compared to only 538 433 in 1921. Although more workers were employed in the early 1920s than before the war, productivity could not be further increased.[15]

Nevertheless, Leopold Pilzer, an entrepreneur from Galicia and the head of the Mundus Corporation, founded in 1907, was able to consolidate the entire industry, while safeguarding the interests and laws of the successor states. In 1917, with the help of a banking consortium led by the Austrian Credit-Anstalt [Credit Bank], he succeeded in buying all the shares of the company, which had already been converted into the *Erste Österreichische Actien-Gesellschaft zur Erzeugung von Möbeln aus gebogenem Holze Jacob & Josef Kohn* [First Austrian Corporation for the Production of Bentwood Furniture Jacob & Josef Kohn] in 1901. After the dissolution of the double monarchy, a central, supranational Mundus Group in which all national Mundus companies were joined, was registered in Zurich in the spring of 1920. Gebrüder Thonet, on the other hand, still under family ownership until that point, continued to try to remain independent. However, due to the problems already described above including financial problems, the form of the company changed in 1921: Gebrüder Thonet became Gebrüder Thonet AG.

But three years later, they had to take shelter under the roof of Mundus. On 12 November 1923, the Thonet Mundus Group Zürich was registered in Zürich.[16] Thus, Mundus AG holding company became one of the largest international furniture manufacturers. The producing companies and businesses of the Mundus Group supplied 80% of the world market for bentwood furniture–even though the furniture was still marketed under the renowned names Thonet and Kohn. The Thonet family itself held a 50% stake in the Thonet Mundus Group but could not prevent the former family business from being converted into independent national companies

12 Cf. *ZA* No. 55, 30 September 1915.
13 Cf. *ZA* No. 59, 31 March 1916.
14 Minutes from the Company Management Conference in Vienna from 10–15 July 1919. Cf. The TON company archive, which is located in the Moravian National Archives in Brno.
15 In 1920, Thonet's gross sales were 6,743,182 K, with 3 093 employees, compared with 6,719,936 K and 3,408 employees in 1921. Therefore, more workers were producing less: In 1920, it was 2,180 K and a year later it was 1,971 K per person. Compare with the balance sheets from the company archives of the corresponding years.
16 Cf. The relevant documents in the Commercial Register Office of the canton of Zurich (officially verified copy from 18 January 1994). The author thanks Peter Ellenberg for information and documents.

Josef Hoffmann: Ausstellungsraum von J. & J. Kohn auf der Werkbund-ausstellung 1914, Köln; aus: *Österreichische Werkkultur,* Wien 1916, 30
Josef Hoffmann: J. & J. Kohn exhibition space at the *Werkbund Exhibition* 1914, Cologne; in: *Österreichische Werkkultur,* Vienna 1916, 30

Vom Bugh

Die nach dem
staltern entwo
Modellen der

GEBRÜDER THONET • WIEN
Federnde Gleittrage für Verwundete
vom k. u. k. Linienschiffsarzt
Dr. FRANZ HAUCK.
Der Zweck dieser Gleittrage ist:
„Schonender und rascher Transport eines Verwundeten über Treppen von Kriegsschiffen während der Gefechtspausen" □
Keine Marine der Welt besitzt eine so praktische, schonende und dabei so leicht zu handhabende Tragbahre wie die k. u. k. österr.-ung. Kriegsmarine in der oben bezeichneten, vom Herrn k. u. k. Linienschiffsarzt Dr. Franz Hauck erfundenen und von uns verfertigten federnden Gleittrage.

Werbeanzeige für eine „Federnde Gleittrage für Verwundete", Entwurf Franz Hauck für die Österreichisch-Ungarische Kriegsmarine, um 1915
Advertisement for a "flexible stretcher for the wounded," design Franz Hauck for the Austro-Hungarian Navy, ca. 1915

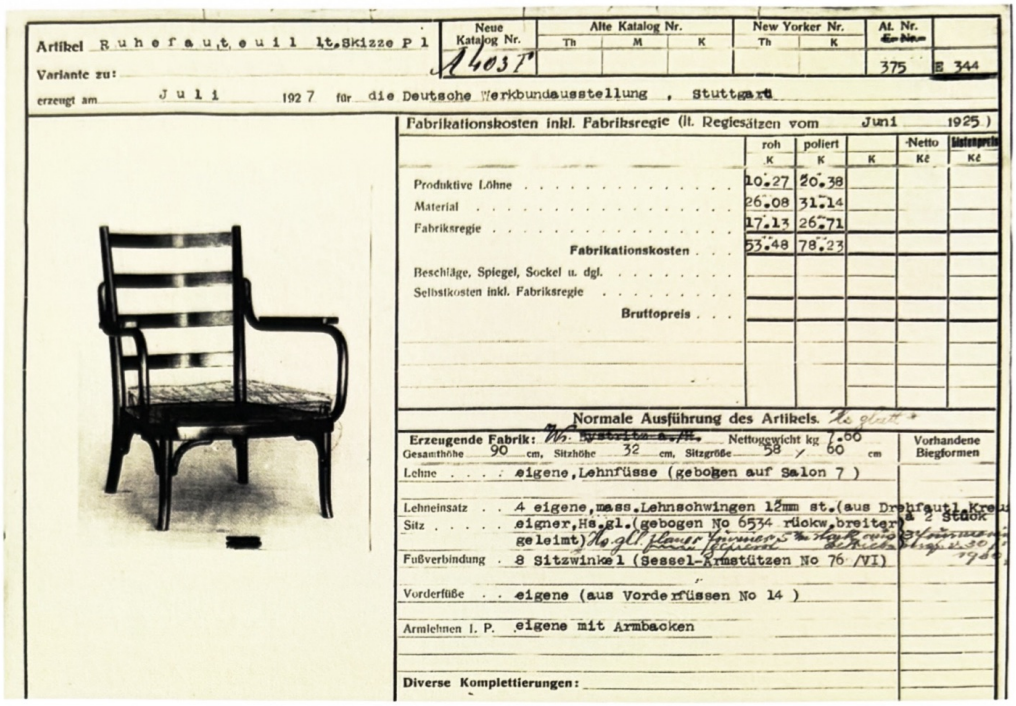
in Austria, Germany, and Czechoslovakia. For example, at the second General Assembly of Mergers in December 1924, the national company Thonet Mundus, *spojené Československé továrny na nábytek z ohýbaného dřeva A.S. Brno* [Combined Czechoslovak Bentwood Furniture Factory Corporation of Brno], was founded.[17] Finally, in 1933, Leopold Pilzer was able to buy all of Thonet Mundus' shares from the Credit-Anstalt and was then the sole head of the Mundus Group.[18] The annual dividends of the 1920s show how successful the company was under his management: In 1923 they amounted to 5% and rose by one percent each year to a respectable 9% by 1927.

While the Kohn company's archives are believed to be lost forever, in 2014 and 2016, large parts of the archives of the Thonet Mundus company were discovered by Radmil Tomčík, an employee of the TON Corporation in the attic of a building on the old Thonet factory site in Bystřice pod Hostýnem. These documents contain lists of products from the Interwar Period, the years of the World War, and the first years of the Post-War Period. In total, the archive cards which were found list 6 247 different pieces of furniture. One of the big surprises is the fact that here there are also numerous unknown models listed which cannot be found in any of the catalogs, including a large assortment of folding chairs and office furniture as well as products that do not require any bentwood parts to produce.[19] The vast majority of the index cards also record the older catalog numbers, which made it possible to compile a clear concordance.[20]

From Bentwood Chair to Tubular Steel Furniture

The bentwood furniture designed by renowned architects and designers after the First World War was very different from the pre-war models: Art Nouveau had given way to objectivity. Only three people who had already worked as designers at the turn of the century remained: Josef Hoffmann with two models, Otto Prutscher with a few more designs, and Gustav Siegel as the head of a designing office. The new generation of designers, which appeared in the second half of the 1920s, included names like Antonín Boček, Josef Frank, Heyer, Ferdinand Kramer, Eberhardt Kraus, Hans Luckhardt, Adolf Gustav Schneck, Sostheim, Max Urban, Otakar Vaňura, Prof. Paul and Insp. Slezák. The architect Adolf Loos did not indeed design a new model, but in an essay published in 1929, he claimed that already before the turn of the century he had regarded the bentwood chair as "the only modern chair," asserting that the Thonet chair would be the successor of the dying classic, the carpenter's chair.[21] With his prediction, however, he was correct only in so far as it was then the tubular steel chairs that were in accord with the contemporary aesthetic tastes and which were also included in the program of the Thonet company starting from 1929. The classic bentwood furniture, on the other hand, had gone out of fashion by 1930, at the latest. As the architect Karl Mang wrote in his book on Thonet in 1982, looking back at the bentwood furniture that had been created since the mid-1920s: "The construction of tubular steel furniture, which has been in use over the years, seems to have inspired some designers to develop a rather strict concept of chair

17 Cf. *Amtsblatt der Tschechoslowakischen Republik*, No. 288 from 20 December 1924.
18 Three members of the Thonet family–Theodor, Dr. Richard, and Julius Thonet senior–were still represented in the management of the Czechoslovak subsidiary of Thonet Mundus. Cf. *Geschäftsnachricht des Verwaltungsrates Thonet-Mundus, vereinigte tschechoslowakische Fabriken für Möbel aus gebogenem Holz A.G. in Brünn, für das Geschäftsjahr 1930/1931*, presented at the 9th Annual General Meeting of Shareholders held on 7 November 1931.
19 In addition, the index cards prove the cooperation with two companies which needed bentwood components for their own furniture: The Mücke Melder Works as well as the UP Works Brno.
20 The author of this essay has already prepared a comprehensive publication, which hopefully will be published soon.
21 Adolf Loos, "Josef Veillich" (1929), in: id., *Sämtliche Schriften 1*, ed. by Franz Glück, Vienna/Munich 1962, 436–442: 442.



Artikel Ruhefauteuil lt. Skizze P 1
Neue Katalog Nr. A 403 F
Alte Katalog Nr. Th M K
New Yorker Nr. Th K
At. Nr. 375
E 344
Variante zu:
erzeugt am Juli 1927 für die Deutsche Werkbundausstellung, Stuttgart

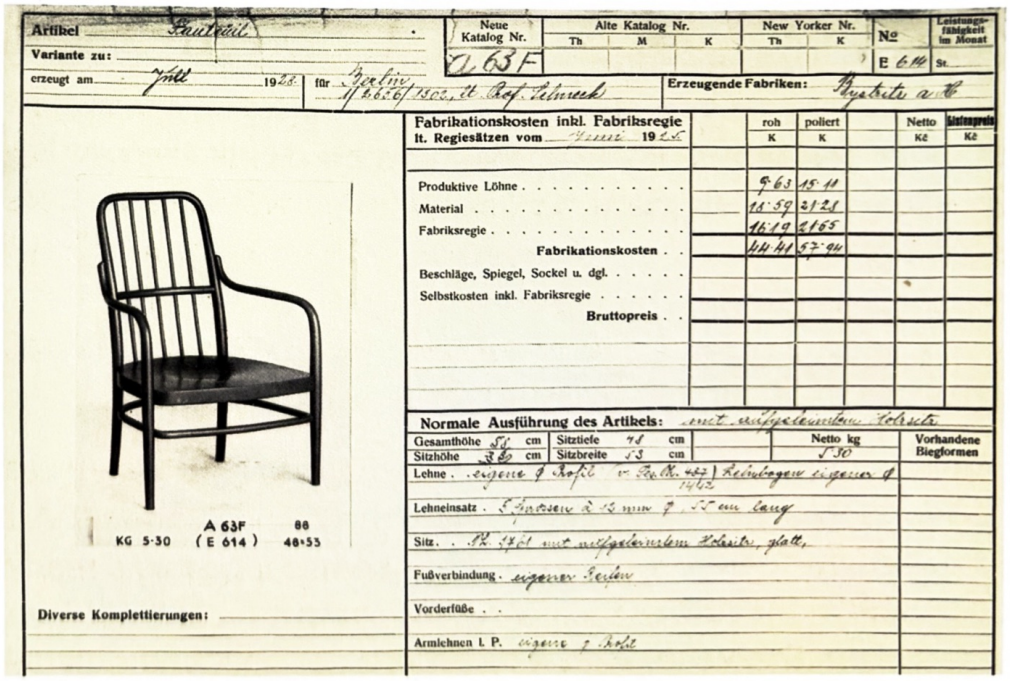
Fabrikationskosten inkl. Fabriksregie (lt. Regiesätzen vom Juni 1925)

	roh K	poliert K	K	Netto Kč	Sitzenpreis Kč
Produktive Löhne	10.27	20.38			
Material	26.08	31.14			
Fabriksregie	17.13	26.71			
Fabrikationskosten	53.48	78.23			
Beschläge, Spiegel, Sockel u. dgl.					
Selbstkosten inkl. Fabriksregie					
Bruttopreis					

Normale Ausführung des Artikels: Re glatt *
Erzeugende Fabrik: Ws. Bystritz a./H. Nettogewicht kg 7.66
Gesamthöhe 90 cm, Sitzhöhe 32 cm, Sitzgröße 38 / 60 cm
Vorhandene Biegformen

Lehne . . . . eigene, Lehnfüsse (gebogen auf Salon 7)
Lehneinsatz . . 4 eigene, mass. Lehnschwingen 12mm st. (aus Drehfauteuil Kreu
Sitz . . . . . eigner, Hs. gl. (gebogen No 6534 rückw. breiter
geleimt) Re gl. glatter
Fußverbindung . 8 Sitzwinkel (Sessel-Armstützen No 76 /VI)
Vorderfüße . . eigene (aus Vorderfüssen No 14)
Armlehnen l. P. eigene mit Armbacken
Diverse Komplettierungen:

Karteikarte von Thonet Mundus für das Modell A 403F, Entwurf Josef Frank, 1927 Thonet Mundus index card for the A 403F model, design Josef Frank, 1927



Artikel Fauteuil
Neue Katalog Nr. A 63 F
Alte Katalog Nr. Th M K
New Yorker Nr. Th K
Nº E 614
Leistungsfähigkeit im Monat St.
Variante zu:
erzeugt am Juli 1928 für Berlin
Erzeugende Fabriken: Bystritz a/H

Fabrikationskosten inkl. Fabriksregie
lt. Regiesätzen vom Januar 1925

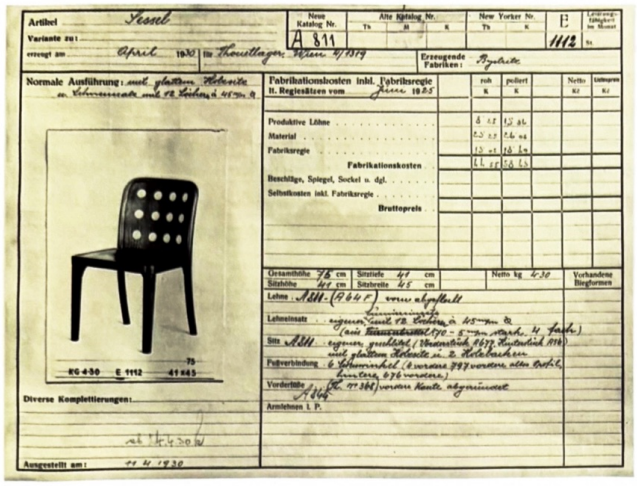
	roh K	poliert K		Netto Kč	Sitzenpreis Kč
Produktive Löhne	9.63	15.11			
Material	11.59	21.21			
Fabriksregie	16.19	21.65			
Fabrikationskosten	44.41	57.94			
Beschläge, Spiegel, Sockel u. dgl.					
Selbstkosten inkl. Fabriksregie					
Bruttopreis					

A 63F 88
KG 5·30 (E 614) 46·53

Normale Ausführung des Artikels: mit mitgeformtem Holzsitz
Gesamthöhe 84 cm, Sitztiefe 41 cm, Sitzbreite 53 cm
Netto kg 5.30
Vorhandene Biegformen

Lehne . eigene 9 Rohr (v. Fa. M. 467) Reihenfolge eigener 9 1462
Lehneinsatz . 5 Sprossen à 12 mm 9 55 cm lang
Sitz . Pl. 1761 mit mitgeformtem Holzsitz, glatt,
Fußverbindung . eigener Fuß
Vorderfüße . .
Armlehnen l. P. eigene 9 Rohr
Diverse Komplettierungen:

Karteikarte von Thonet Mundus für das Modell A 63F, Entwurf Adolf Gustav Schneck, 1928 Thonet Mundus index card for the A 63F model, design Adolf Gustav Schneck, 1928



Karteikarte von Thonet Mundus für das Modell A 811, Entwurf Josef Hoffmann, 1930 Thonet Mundus index card for the A 811 model, design Josef Hoffmann, 1930

construction. A further development of the rich vocabulary of the classic bentwood chairs had been put to an end not only for work-related reasons, but in the polarization of tradition and avant-garde thinking, the 'Thonet style' had come to an end."[22]

The new functionalist building, which had become established in the 1920s as the so-called International Style[23], also brought about major changes in interior design: Modern tubular steel furniture, first developed by Marcel Breuer at the Bauhaus in 1925, seemed particularly suitable for furnishing appropriate interiors. After the Bauhaus moved to Dessau, Breuer was able to use the workshops of the aircraft manufacturer Junkers as a technological laboratory for a short time. Here, the young architect was able to experiment with the new material and develop some of the prototypes that were to dominate the furniture style of the late 1920s and early 1930s.[24] In the production of tubular steel furniture, an attempt was made to keep the diameter and bending radii of the steel tubes as low as possible. The most satisfying results were achieved with the seamless tubular steel from Mannesmann, and impressive constructions were formed from long continuous pieces of pipe that could be assembled using special plyers. In order not to break the elegance of the lines, the early tubular steel chairs were mainly covered with "eisengarn" an especially strong and usually colorful cotton fabric. Initially the tubular steel itself was nickel-plated and it was only later that it was predominantly chrome-plated. As garden furniture, however, the tubular steel furniture was also "delivered, without a surcharge, nitrocellulose-painted in all colors of the fabric covering"–the fabric covering was "available in the following colors: grey, rust-brown, orange, red, green, blue, black, and yellow."[25]

In 1926/27 Breuer and his fellow Hungarian Kálmán Lengyel founded a company called Standard Möbel in Berlin, which was joined a year later by Anton Lorenz–also a Hungarian. Lorenz became the managing director of the company which had been established to market Breuer's designs and which was sold to Thonet in 1929 at a huge profit. The tubular steel furniture company Desta, which was founded by Lorenz immediately after this sale, was also taken over by Thonet in the early 1930s. Due to the complicated, constantly changing production authorizations and licensing at that time, it is now not always easy to identify the manufacturer of a specific piece of furniture, even if the model and the designer are clearly known. After several court-held disputes over copyright and production rights, Lorenz himself eventually became a well-paid employee of Thonet.[26]

So, it was not the Thonet Mundus Group that initiated the production of the new tubular steel furniture. Nevertheless, with his energetic and skillful business strategy the chairman of the holding company, Leopold Pilzer, managed to lead the company to the undisputed top of this growing industry until the 1930s. Thonet Mundus had already started producing its own tubular steel furniture at the Thonet Frères factory in Paris, where Bruno Weill, the son of Rudolf Weill, one of the founding members of Mundus, worked. As a talented young designer in Paris, Bruno Weill produced some convincing models under the pseudonym Béwé. Only after

22 Karl Mang, *Thonet Bugholzmöbel. Von der handwerklichen Fertigung zur industriellen Produktion*, Vienna 1982, 123f.

23 Cf. Walter Gropius, *International Architecture* (1925), Zurich 2019, as well as Walter Curt Behrendt, *The Victory of the New Building Style* (1927), Los Angeles 2000.

24 Cf. Walter Scheiffele, *Bauhaus, Junkers, Sozialdemokratie: ein Kraftfeld der Moderne*, Berlin 2003, as well as Helmut Erfurth, *Junkers, das Bauhaus und die Moderne*, Dessau-Roßlau 2010.

25 The information comes from the price list from Gebrüder Thonet Frankenberg 1934. Here the first indication of chrome plating also appears: "Our furniture [...] is copper-plated, then nickel-plated and finally chrome-plated. According to the current state of the art, chrome plating offers the best possible protection against rust and is therefore definitely preferable to ordinary nickel plating."

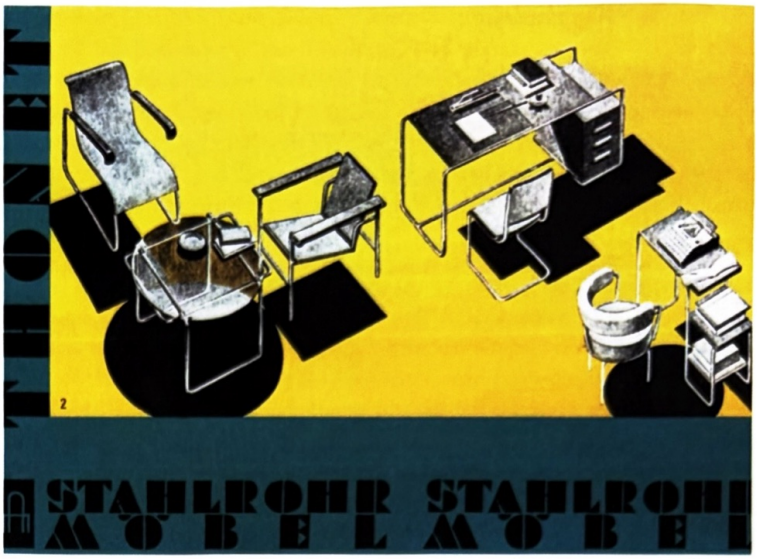
26 In the end Lorenz proved to be a skilled businessman by winning the patent rights for the so-called *Kragstuhl*–the cantilever tubular steel chair without rear legs, which dates back to an artistic design by the Dutch architect Mart Stam. Cf. Otakar Máčel, *Der Freischwinger. Vom Avantgardeentwurf zur Ware* (Dissertation.), Delft 1992.

B 33
Thonet

B 34
Thonet

Steckkarten für die Thonet-Modelle B 33 und B 34,
Entwurf Marcel Breuer; Stahlrohrmöbelkatalog 1930
Stock cards for the Thonet models B 33 and B 34,
design Marcel Breuer; Tubular steel catalog 1930

Thonet-Stahlrohrmöbelkatalog (Steckkartenkatalog) 1930
Thonet tubular steel furniture catalog (Stock card catalog) 1930



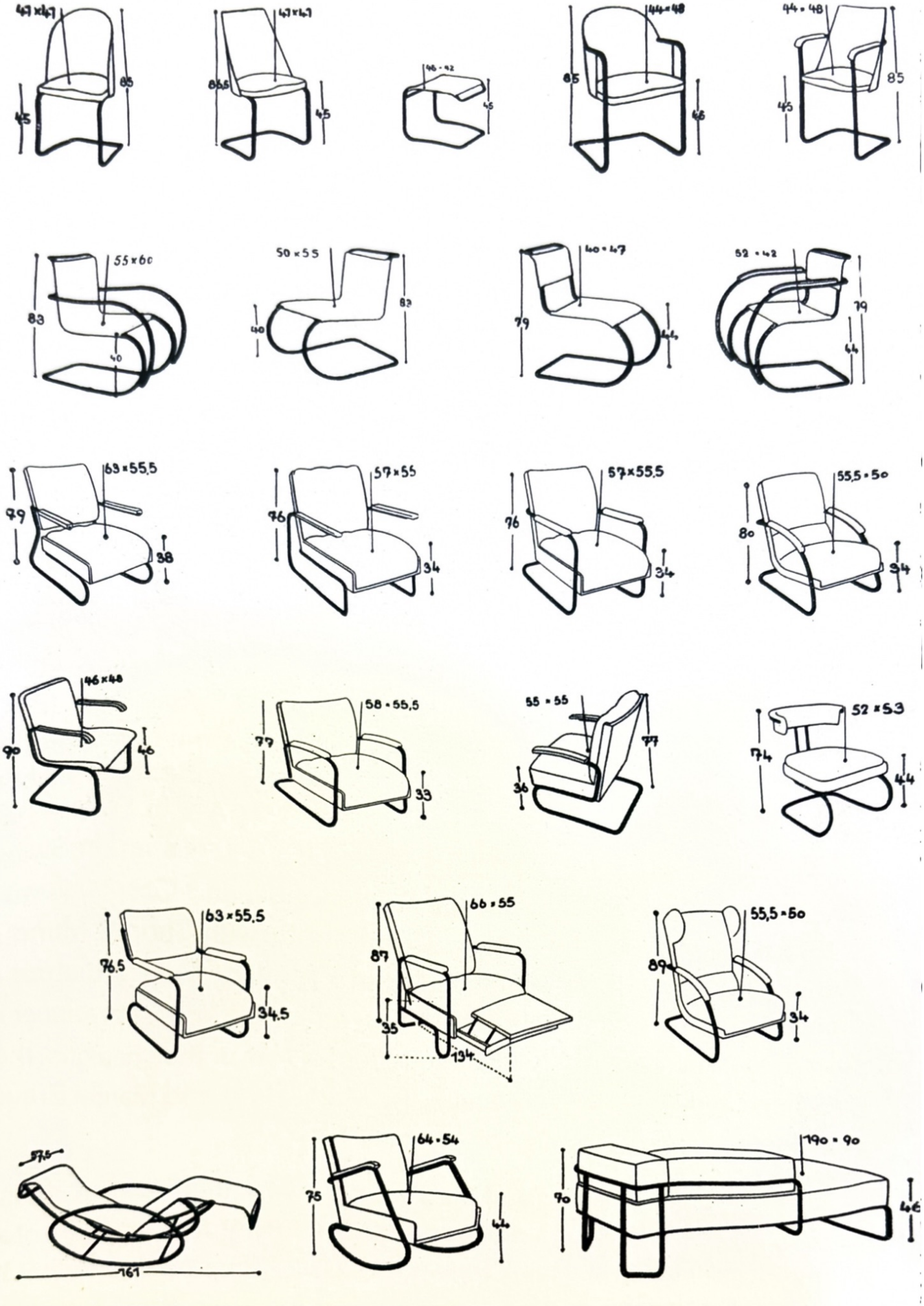
the sale of Standard Möbel to the Gebrüder Thonet AG in 1929 the production of tubular steel furniture started in Frankenberg and the company, of course, immediately claimed the success for itself: "It is no coincidence that the Thonet Mundus Group was also the first to champion modern tubular steel furniture and included this branch of industry in its product range at a time when the general public saw this type of furniture as purely an architect's fancy and was calling it 'sanatorium furniture'. [...] As the industrialization of tubular steel furniture production became increasingly widespread, the Thonet Mundus Group appeared to be the most important pioneer in this new direction, the popularization of this trendy furniture was possible in a very short period of time."[27]

However, until it was overtaken by Gebrüder Thonet Frankenberg in around 1930, the largest company in the (tubular) steel furniture sector was L. & C. Arnold in Schorndorf near Stuttgart: Since 1871 the company had already specialized in garden and hospital furniture made of metal and later also included corresponding products made of tubular steel in its product range. The Josef Müller's "Berliner Metallwerke" [Berlin Metalworks] was a smaller manufacturer which was the first to produce tubular steel furniture by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, before his models were also manufactured by the Gebrüder Thonet AG in Frankenberg. Numerous other factories and plants were also established in Switzerland, France, Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Czechoslovakia, where, on the basis of licensing agreements with Thonet Mundus, the company Mücke Melder, founded in Freistadt (now a district of Karviné) in 1915, was able to establish itself as the largest producer of tubular steel furniture. With the exception of a few of their designs, they produced almost exclusively models by Mart Stam and Marcel Breuer in license.[28]

In addition to Stam, Breuer, and Mies van der Rohe, there were of course other designers of tubular steel furniture; in Germany, for example, Anton Lorenz, Kálmán Lengyel, Heinz Rasch, and Wassily Luckhardt, after 1930 also Erich Dieckmann and as one of the few Austrians, Ernst Plischke. In France it was primarily the trio Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, and Charlotte Perriand; under the direction of the aforementioned Bruno Weill, Thonet Frères also produced models by Émile Guyot, René Herbst, and

27 (No author), "Stahlrohrmöbel. Thonet-Möbel seit 100 Jahren modern," in: *Profil*, 1st year, iss. 5, 1933, 177.

28 Other important companies in Czechoslovakia were Hynek Gottwald in Brandýs nad Orlici (Brandeis an der Adler), UP-Závody Brno in a specialized facility in Hodonín, Robert Slezák in Bystřice pod Hostýnem (Bistritz am Hostein) and Jan Vichr in Lysá nad Labem. (Lissa an der Elbe).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66 x 55
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134
55,5 x 50
89
34
57,5
161
64 x 54
75
44
190 x 90
90
46

André Lurçat. The Irish architect Eileen Gray–one of the few women beside Perriand and who, like Perriand, was also often deliberately overshadowed by the jealous architect Le Corbusier[29]–also designed a series of interesting tubular steel furniture. Among the best-known designers who worked in the context of the Czechoslovak Works Federation –*Svaz Československého díla*–are Ladislav Žák and Hana Kučerová-Záveská, who were able to produce their designs with the company called Hynek Gottwald.[30]

In the 1930s, tubular steel furniture from the architectural avant-garde became an increasingly fashionable trend: Upholstered and recklessly winded constructions increasingly replaced simpler models, making the cost of the already expensive furniture even higher. The fact that the steel furniture was primarily luxury goods can be seen by its use in one of the most elaborately furnished villas of the time, the Villa Tugendhat in Brno-Černá pole, which was both designed and specially furnished by the architect Mies van der Rohe.[31]

Gebrüder Thonet, Werk: Frankenberg-Eder (Hessen)
Verkaufsstellen und Vertretungen:
a) Altreich: Berlin C 2, Leipziger Straße 77, Fernruf: 16 2758/59
Frankfurt a. M., Kaiserstraße 33, Fernruf: 316 30
Hamburg, Ferdinandstraße 61, Fernruf: 32-40-29
b) Ostmark: Graz, Herrengasse 26, Fernruf: 2060
Innsbruck, Colingasse 12, Fernruf: 511
Linz, Auerspergstraße 19, Fernruf: 2398
Wien I, am Stephansplatz (Thonethaus), Fernruf: U 21-5-40
Polstermöbelfabrik:
Düsseldorf
Derendorfer Straße 36-38
Fernruf: 31160/61
EF 300
DAF 106/a
Kantinensessel
für Vortragssäle, besonders bevorzugte Modelle der Wehrmacht
Bauernsessel
und Modelle im altdeutschen Stil, nach eigenen und fremden Entwürfen ausgeführt, Modelle Amt „Schönheit der Arbeit"
Sitzmöbel aus dampfgebogenem Holze
nach der Erfindung des Michael Thonet; seit Generationen in der ganzen Welt als beste Qualitätsware bekannt
Polstermöbel
Original Thonet, für jeden Geschmack, in erstklassiger Arbeit, laufend neue Modelle nach eigenen und fremden Entwürfen
A 1079
A 811/1
1022
Stahlrohrmöbel
künstlerisch geschützte Modelle, für den neuzeitlichen schönen und gesunden Raum, geeignet für die Wohnung, Beruf und Betrieb
Siesta-Medizinal
das neue Entspannungsgerät, ermöglicht vollkommenstes Ausruhen. Bereits bestens erprobt in Krankenhäusern, Lazaretten, Kuranstalten. Ausreichende Referenzen stehen auf Wunsch zur Verfügung
Für die gesamte Ostmark
besitzt unsere Organisation noch die Alleinauslieferung der
Original Stolzenberg Büromöbel,
Original Löffler Theatermöbel und
Original Zschocke Schulmöbel
Siesta-Medizinal, Modell A

Thonet-Katalogblatt um 1940 Thonet catalog page ca. 1940

Meanwhile, the idea that simple furniture was also cheap proved to be a misconception. The relatively high prices of tubular steel furniture were caused mainly by three factors: It was possible to produce only in small series, the surface treatment was complex, and the most famous models were eventually produced under copyright. It was only the large-scale production at Thonet's factories in the early 1930s that led to marketable prices, although this did not mean that this furniture would become affordable for everyone. Nevertheless, they seem to be characteristic of the time and many modernly furnished cultural and commercial buildings–for example, the stores of the at that time world-famous Czech shoe company Bat'a–can hardly be imagined without their tubular steel furniture. Thus, tubular steel furniture has inscribed itself deep into cultural memory as a hallmark of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

29 Cf. Caroline Constant, *Eileen Gray*, London/New York 2000, in particular 116–125.

30 Hana Kučerová-Záveská's most famous work is the furnishing of the café on the terraces near the film studios in Prague-Barrandov.

31 The steel furniture of Villa Tugendhat was manufactured by Bamberg Metallwerkstätten in Berlin-Neukölln. The tubular steel chair and armchair MR 10 and MR 20 were later produced in series by Gebrüder Thonet AG in Frankenberg under the numbers MR 533 and MR 534 and were available with various seat and backrest variants. The MR 90 and MR 50 (the so-called "Brno Armchair") made from flat steel strips were not included in Thonet's program.

Heimo Keindl

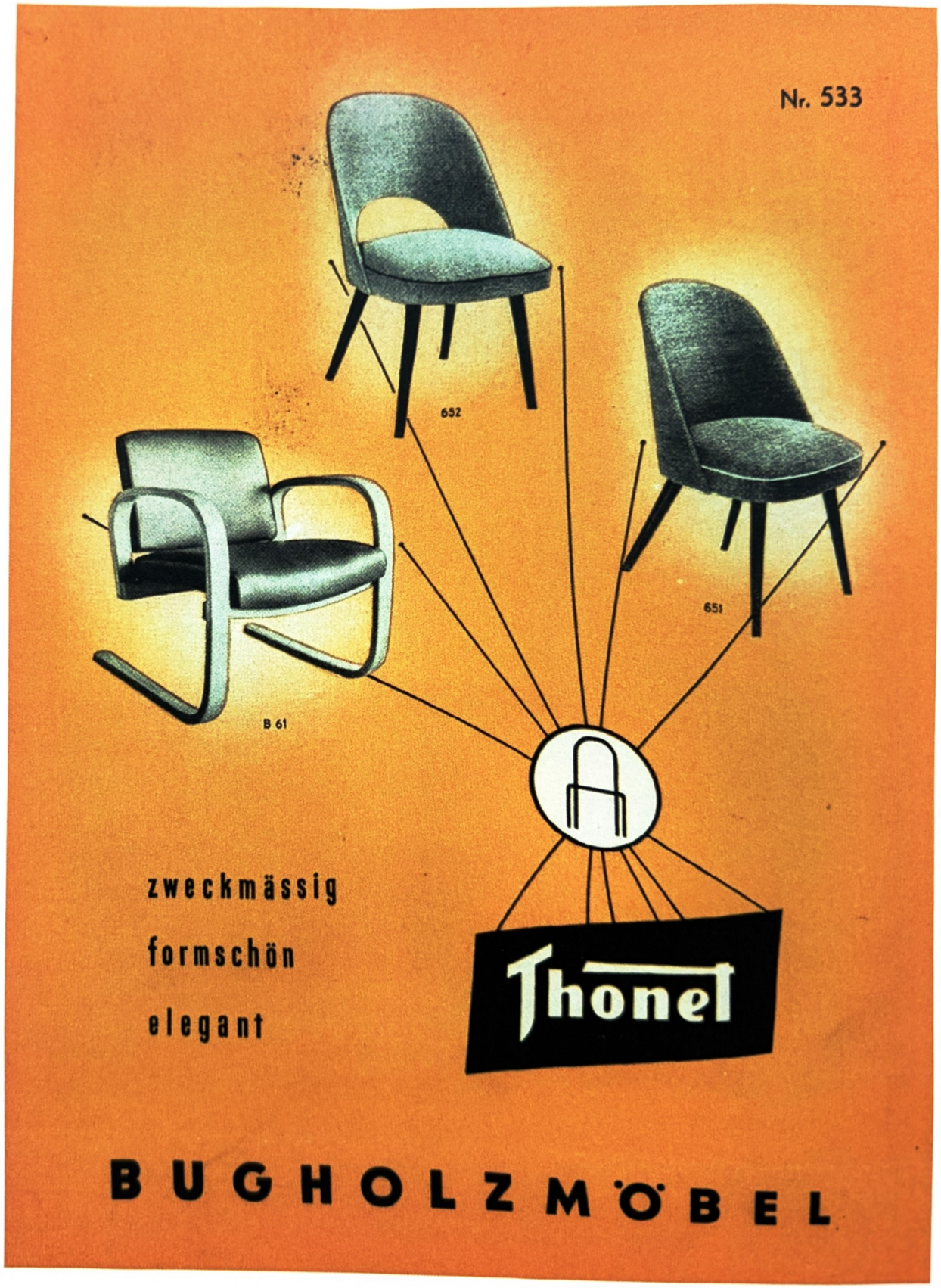
The Thonet Companies in Austria and Germany after 1945

The Thonet factory in Frankenberg an der Eder, Hessen, the last factory founded by Gebrüder Thonet, was established in 1889. In order to avoid customs duties on goods imported from abroad into the German Reich, an independent factory was built there. On 12 March 1945, in the last days of the Second World War, the factory was largely destroyed by bombs which were most likely targeted at the adjacent train station. At the beginning of April fighting took place in Vienna as well. On 11/12 April the Thonet Mundus headquarters in Vienna fell victim to fires burning at Stephansplatz [St. Stephen's Square].

However, the greatest disaster had already hit the international company Thonet Mundus a few years earlier. With the invasion of Austria by the German Wehrmacht in March 1938, Thonet Mundus was crushed and the majority owner of the widely branched Trust Association, Leopold Pilzer, had to emigrate to the USA via Switzerland because of his Jewish origin. Pilzer retained the trademark rights worldwide.[1] He then successfully established Thonet in the United States, whereby the production for this large market had to be completely re-organized. Three existing furniture factories were purchased: Statesville (North Carolina) was converted for the production of classic bentwood furniture, in York (Pennsylvania) the production of plywood chairs began under the direction of Bruno Weill, the stepson of Leopold Pilzer, and Sheboygan (Wisconsin) was intended to continue to produce traditional American furniture.[2] The founder of the American Thonet Company, Leopold Pilzer, died in 1959, his successor Bruno Weill in 1962.[3] In 1987 the largest hotel outfitter in America, Shelby Williams, took over the company under Manfred Steinfeld, who was the company's president at the time.

Although the Thonet family managed to escape an "Aryanization" in the national socialist *Großdeutsches Reich* through immediate, complicated renamings, the events of world history eventually thwarted these efforts. The dimension of what was torn apart is clearly indicated by the following figures: In the 1930s, the Thonet Mundus Group had 22 production sites and up to 37 group sales branches. What the uneven ownership situation looked like is worth an investigation of its own.

1 In this connection, the company completely reverted to the ownership of the Thonet family. Compare to the different representations: Jiří Uhlíř, *Thonet Mundus. A ti druzi*, Mesto Ujezd/Brna 2011, p. 108ff.
2 Cf. Manfred Steinfeld, "Thonet Industries. Die Erschließung des nordamerikanischen Marktes," in: Exhib. Cat. Koblenz 1996: *Thonet, Biegen oder Brechen*, 166–171: 167 ff., as well as Nina Stritzler, "Thonet: Modern Furniture since 1922," in: Exhib. Cat. Chicago/Washington 1993: *Against The Grain. Bentwood Furniture from the Collection of Fern and Manfred Steinfeld*, 101–111.
3 Jan van Geest / Otakar Máčel, *Stühle aus Stahl, Metallmöbel* 1925–1940, Cologne 1980, 132.



Polsterstühle; Thonet-Katalog 1953
Upholstered chairs; Thonet catalog 1953

standorte und bis
Besitzverhältnisse

FABRIKEN DES KONZERNS:

THONET-MUNDUS

Bugholzmöbelfabriken:

Gebrüder Thonet A. G.	Frankenberg	Deutschland
Gebrüder Thonet A. G.	Erdmannsdorf	
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Bystritz a. H.	Tschecho-slovakei
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Holleschau	
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Hranice	
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Koritschan	
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Teschen	
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Wselin	
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Banska Bystrica	
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Buczkowice	Polen
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Heinzendorf	
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Radomsko	
Industria de Lemn Mundus si Borlova Armenis S. P. A.	Ineu	Rumänien
Thonet-Mundus d. d.	Varaždin	S. H. S.
Thonet frères	Paris	Frankreich
Thonet Bros. Inc.	New York	U. S. A.
J. & J. Kohn and Mundus Inc.	New York	
Jac. & Jos. Kohn Inc.	Toronto	Kanada

Kunstmöbelfabriken:

Heinrich Röhrs A. G.	Prag	Tschechoslovakei
Bothe & Ehrmann I. W. Müller A. G.	Wien	Österreich

Ladenmöbelfabriken:

Gebrüder Thonet A. G.	Erdmannsdorf	Schlesien
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Koritschan	Tschechoslovakei

Zeichenartikelfabrik:

Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Hranice	Tschechoslovakei

Fournierfabriken:

Gebrüder Thonet A. G.	Frankenberg	Hessen
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Holleschau	Tschechoslovakei
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Heinzendorf	Polen
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Radomsko	
Industria de Lemn Mundus si Borlova Armenis S. P. A.	Caransebes	Rumänien

Stahlrohrmöbelfabrik:

Gebrüder Thonet A. G.	Erdmannsdorf	Schlesien

Sägewerke:

Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Wselin	Tschecho-slovakei
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Koritschan	
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Banska Bystrica	
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Polani	Polen
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Radomsko	
Industria de Lemn Mundus si Borlova Armenis S. P. A.	Caransebes	Rumänien

Maschinen-Fabrik und Gießerei:

Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Wselin	Tschechoslovakei

Schrauben-Fabriken:

Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Wselin	Tschechoslovakei
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Radomsko	Polen

KONZERNVERKAUFSSTELLEN:

Gebrüder Thonet A. G.	Berlin
Thonet-Mundus Kohn Ges. m. b. H.	Berlin
Gebrüder Thonet G. m. b. H.	Frankfurt a. M.
Gebrüder Thonet G. m. b. H.	Hamburg
Thonet-Mundus J. & J. Kohn	München
J. & J. Kohn A. G.	Köln
Sommer & Co.	Düsseldorf
Sommer & Co.	Mannheim
S. Pilzer	Breslau
Eugen Perl	Danzig
Thonet-Mundus Ges. m. b. H.	Wien
Jac. & Jos. Kohn	Wien
Thonet-Mundus Ges. m. b. H.	Graz
Thonet-Mundus Akc. spol.	Prag
Thonet-Mundus Akc. spol.	Brünn
Thonet frères	Paris
Thonet frères	Lyon
Thonet frères	Marseille
Thonet frères	Brüssel
Société d'Ameublement pour l'Afrique du Nord	Alger
N. V. Handelmaatschappij voor gebogen meubelen en houtindustrie	Amsterdam
Thonet-Mundus S. A.	Bielsko
Thonet-Mundus S. A.	Warschau
Thonet-Mundus A. G.	Budapest
Grifé & Escoda	Barcelona
Berthold Kahn	Basel
Staudt y Cia. S. A. C.	Buenos Aires
Skandinavisk Thonet-Mundus A. S.	Kopenhagen
Handelsgesellschaft Adler	Kowno
Thonet Bros. Ltd.	London
Mundus and J. & J. Kohn Ltd.	London
Soc. Ital. Fratelli Thonet	Milano
Soc. Ital. Fratelli Thonet	Napoli
Ditta Lau Felici	Roma
Thonet Bros. Inc.	New York
J. & J. Kohn and Mundus Inc.	New York
Industria de Lemn Mundus si Borlova Armenis S. P. A.	Timisoara

Auflistung der Konzernbetriebe von Thonet Mundus, 1931
List of the companies of Thonet Mundus group, 1931

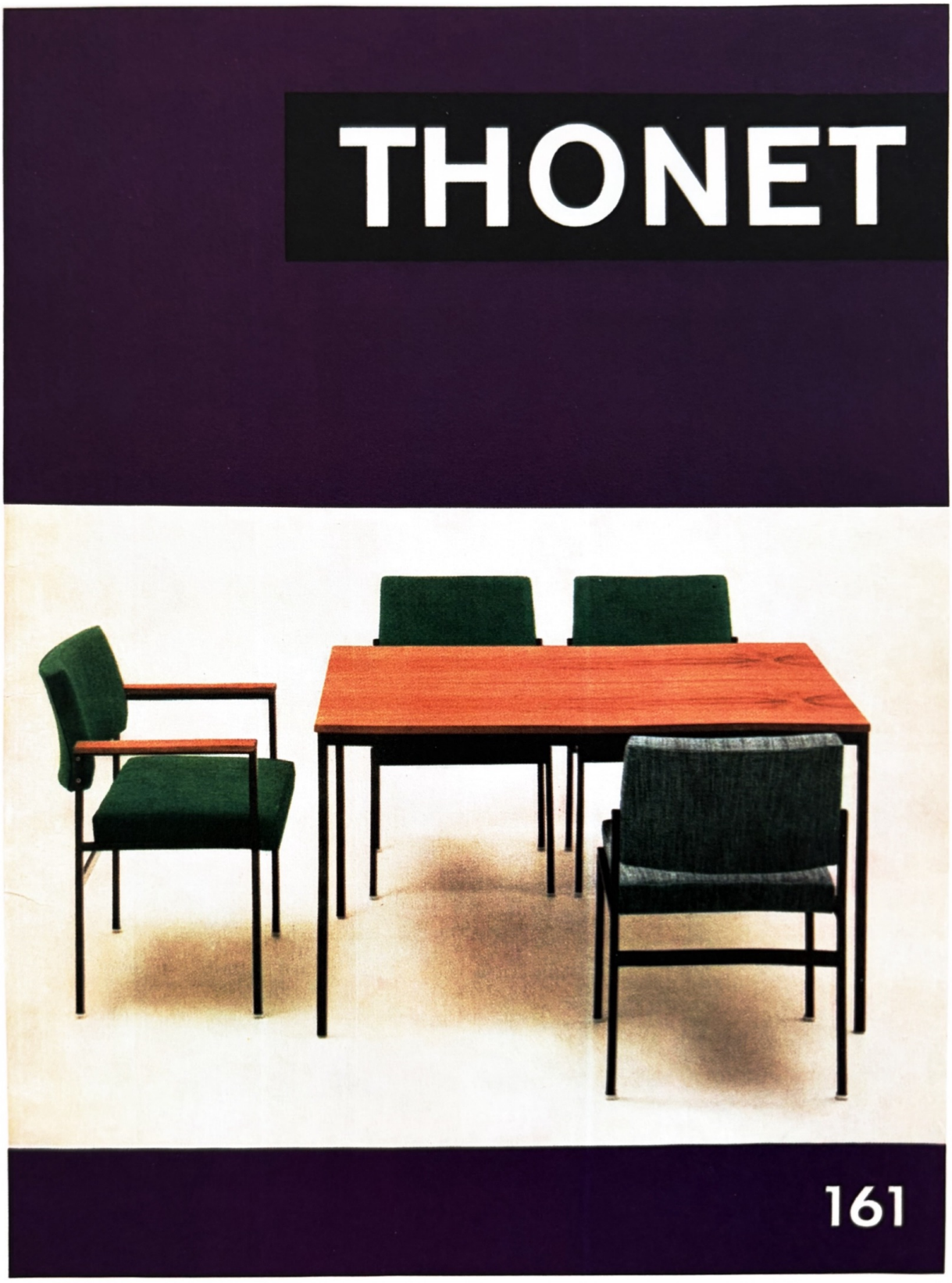
Gebrüder Thonet AG in Frankenberg

Under the direction of the engineer Georg Thonet, the second son of Dr. Richard Thonet, the workers returning from the war immediately began with the reconstruction of the factory in Frankenberg. Gradually production could begin: First with a simple slatted chair, then with shell chairs, which did not make any major technological demands. Like those made by their competitors, they usually had a solid seat frame with slanted wooden legs or a round steel frame. The back of two-dimensional curved plywood was screwed to the seat frame from behind.

The decisive factor for the further development was Hanno von Gustedt, who joined the company in Frankenberg in 1957 and soon took over the management of the Thonet-owned design office.[4] The "new objectivity" replaced the organic design vocabulary and the focus was on one's own successful past.

Even if after the war one bent mechanically and thus only two-dimensionally, from 1960 onward it was possible once again to produce three-dimensional parts from curved wood. The plant manager Paul Stanoßek developed a successor model for chair No. 14, which received the model

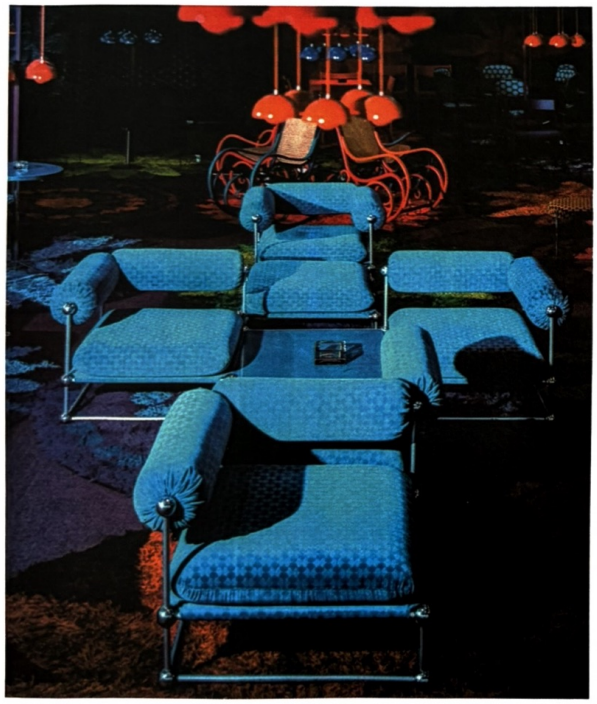
4 Exhib. Cat. Leipzig/Bielefeld 2014: *Sitzen – Liegen – Schaukeln. Möbel von Thonet*, 179.



Stühle aus der Serie S 800, Entwurf Hanno von Gustedt, 1961; Thonet-Katalog 1961 Chairs from the S 800 series, design Hanno von Gustedt, 1961; Thonet catalog 1961

Thonet-Program
wirkung auf die
war das 1976 vo
kombinierte eine

Bugholzstuhl 214, Entwurf Paul Stanoßek, 1960; Thonet-Katalog 1968 Bentwood chair No. 214, design Paul Stanoßek, 1960; Thonet catalog 1968



Messestand der Gebrüder Thonet AG auf der Kölner Möbelmesse1968; Entwurf von Verner Panton mit überwiegend eigenen Möbeln, Lampen und Textilien Stand for Gebrüder Thonet AG at the 1968 Cologne Furniture Fair; design by Verner Panton, mostly with his own furniture, lamps, and textiles

number 214.[5] Technically and formally, the distance to the original is certainly more than just a "facelift". The product family related to this model (upholstery designs, armrest models, etc.) was very functionally designed and became a reliable pillar of the collection with subsequent, reissued bentwood classics, whereby the addition of the wave of nostalgia which began in the 1970s contributed to an increase in sales figures.

With the establishment of new steel furniture production from 1970 onwards, the conditions were in place to connect with one's own past in this sector as well.[6] In the 1930s, Thonet was perhaps the largest tubular steel furniture producer with the innovative designs of the Bauhaus.[7] The cantilever copyrights were defended wherever possible. The historical designs of Marcel Breuer, Mart Stam, and Mies van der Rohe were reintroduced to the sales program. New models in tubular steel, such as the S 46 cantilever series by Rudolf Glatzel or the S 41 by Hanno von Gustedt, were also quite capable of joining in on this.

Thonet gained international attention through its collaboration with Danish designer Verner Panton, albeit not for long. His stand design at the Cologne Furniture Fair of 1969 was extraordinary and widely spoken of. A number of Panton's designs were included in the Thonet program, good for PR, but unfortunately without any noticeable effect on sales. However, the FLEX program, which was presented in 1976, was a resounding success. Gerd Lange, the designer, combined a flexible plastic tub made of polypropylene with round wooden legs, making Thonet start to work with a new material; plastic. The program consisted of a stacking chair with and without armrests, waiting room chairs, and a swivel chair, so it was primarily intended for public interiors. FLEX was a trendsetter which was eagerly "recreated" by competitors: for Thonet Frankenberg, FLEX remained the revenue generator for more than two decades.

At the Cologne Furniture Fair 1985, the new stacking chair range CUT by Gerd Lange and the stacking chair with armrest S 320 by Wulf Schneider/Ulrich Böhme were presented. In contrast to the FLEX program, CUT was not successful, however the S 320 was a great economic success despite many functional objections. Combinations of materials in the seating area had just become fashionable and the S 320 was a mix of plywood, tubular steel, and bentwood, and it also became a trendsetter that inspired many designers to create comparable models.[8]

Thonet Frankenberg was very accommodating to the growing demand for formal simplicity in the 1990s. The Bauhaus program was expanded, and the models from their own history inspired new designs at a high-quality level. The cantilever S 73 by the in-house designer Josef Gorcica and the S 60, a design by Glen Oliver Löw, were and still are in high demand in the upscale administrative sector.[9] The S 900 seating and table series by the English architect Norman Foster also correspond to this rather reductionist style. Extruded aluminum profiles were combined with rectangular plastic seats and backrests. From a commercial point of view, however, S 900 met with only moderate success.

In 1994, succeeding Georg Thonet, Claus M. Thonet, assisted by his brothers Peter and Phillip, took over the management until 2008. Today, this fifth generation has retired from operations and the sixth generation sits on the advisory board. In the 2000s, there was great economic success with the designs of Delphin Design. Starting from the year 2000,

5 Fritz Werner Haver, *100 Jahre Thonet Frankenberg 1889–1989, Festschrift*, Frankenberg 1989, 27.
6 As early as 1948, a small production of tubular steel furniture started in Düsseldorf, which was relocated to Frankenberg in 1954. Here a "second factory" with a floor area of 7200 m² was built in 1970. In 1978, a further extension was added.
7 Alexander von Vegesack, *Deutsche Stahlrohrmöbel. 650 Modelle aus Katalogen von 1927–1958*, Munich 1986, 68ff.
8 Gebrüder Thonet GmbH, *Thonet, Geschichte einer Möbelmarke, Frankenberg 1995, 22.*
9 Gebrüder Thonet GmbH, *Thonet Essence 01*, Frankenberg 2001, 140–144.

Reihenstuhl S 320P, Entwurf Wulf Schneider und Ulrich Böhme, 1985; Thonet-Teilkatalog 1990
Row chair S 320P, design Wulf Schneider and Ulrich Böhme, 1985; Thonet partial catalog 1990

Freischwinger S 46F, Entwurf Rudolf Glatzel, 1972; Thonet-Katalog 1972
Cantilever chair S 46F, design Rudolf Glatzel, 1972; Thonet catalog 1972

Reihenstuhl S 360, Entwurf Delphin Design, 2000
Row chair S 360, design Delphin Design, 2000

this Berlin office–Thomas G. Wagner and Dirk Loff–developed seating furniture series for the row and stacking chair sector.[10] First, the armchair series S 360 was introduced. Seat and back, both made of plastic, are mounted on a tubular steel frame. What makes it special is the row connection, which in the true sense does not even exist. The connection is achieved by superimposing the armrests. Over the next two decades, Delphin Design designers in the field of stackable chairs were able, together with Thonet, to develop further product lines, such as the S 160 series, with slender plastic tubs or, optionally, plywood;[11] The series S 260 from 2018 offers another almost perfect row chair program.

Today, in the bicentennial anniversary year of Michael Thonet's takeover of his father's workshop in Boppard, the classic bentwood furniture accounts for not even 10 per cent, while the Bauhaus furniture–in the centenary of the founding of this school–account for approximately 25 per cent of total revenue at Thonet in Frankenberg. The name recognition of the Thonet brand is still very high, but over the decades the image of the mass chair maker, whose symbol was the café chair, has become that of a premium producer.[12]

Gebrüder Thonet OHG and Gebrüder Thonet Vienna

As of 1853 Vienna was the location of the headquarters of the Gebrüder Thonet company.[13] Even after the mergers in the 1920s Vienna remained the de facto headquarters, however as of 1945 there was no group, but rather only individual companies in the different countries. Under the management of Dr. Fritzjakob Thonet chair production was once again started in a company-owned building at the Weißgerberlände in Vienna's third district.[14] Fritzjakob was the eldest son of Richard Thonet, thus a great-grandson of the company founder.[15]

Since, starting in 1948, it was considered to be certain that the former production sites, then behind the Iron Curtain, had been definitively lost, production was moved to a leased property for several years. In 1963, a newly built factory in Friedberg in eastern Styria, about 100 kilometers south of Vienna, started operation.[16] Some designs from the 1950s and 1960s are still remarkable today, although other product lines–such as chairs in rustic style and school furniture–were the actual "sales drivers" at that time. Among the more sophisticated models are the designs from architects and university professors such as Oswald Haerdtl, Roland Rainer, Franz Hoffmann, and Karl Schwanzer.

The sales were organized through their own showrooms in Graz, Linz, Innsbruck, Klagenfurt, and of course Vienna. No longer at Stephansplatz, but first on Seilergasse and, as of 1971, at the Kohlmarkt.[17] That was the original location of Café Daum, the coffeehouse that was the first public institution to be furnished with the No.4 chair from Michael Thonet after the hotel "Zur Königin von England" in Pest [Budapest] in 1859.[18] The reconstruction was planned by architect Karl Mang, who dealt with the Thonet phenomenon early after the Second World War. In 1965, he designed the exhibition "*Bugholzmöbel–Das Werk Michael Thonets*" in Vienna, a traveling exhibition which visited many European

10 Exhib. Cat. Leipzig/Bielefeld 2014 (see note 4), 178.
11 Ibid., 173.
12 Thanks to Percy Thonet for diverse information.
13 CF. Commercial Court of Vienna: Recording of a partnership, 1853, Recording of a partnership under Gebrüder Thonet, 1863, 146.
14 Today, the Kunsthaus Wien is located in the buildings on Weißgerberlnde (Hundertwasser Museum).
15 Obituary: Jacob Thonet with list of relatives, Mödling 1929.
16 Cf. Gebrüder Thonet, letter with message to the district magistrate's office Hartberg, 1963.
17 After World War II, the Austrian Thonet company also frequently sold goods from other producers, among others, as the general representative of the Danish company Fritz Hansen. Cf. sales records from Thonet from the 1960s to the 1980s.
18 Cf. Letter from Michael Thonet Jr. to his friend Jakob Henrich in Boppard from 15.8.1851, in: Exhib. Cat. Koblenz 1996, 35–49: 40.

Verkaufslokal am Kohlmarkt in Wien, Entwurf Karl und Eva Mang, 1971; Foto: Lucca Chmel Sales branch at the Kohlmarkt in Vienna, design Karl and Eva Mang, 1971; photo: Lucca Chmel

Da es ab dem Jahr 1948 als sicher galt, dass
stätten, nun hinter dem Eisernen Vorhang, en
legte man die Produktion für einige Jahre in
wurde dann ein neu errichtetes Werk in Fried
ca. 100 Kilometer südlich von Wien, in Betrie
würfe aus den 1950er und 1960er Jahren sin
kenswert, wenn auch andere Sortimente

Messestand in Paris 1955, Stapelsessel A 364, Entwurf Karl Schwanzer, 1953; Foto: Chevojon Fair booth in Paris 1955, Stacking chair A 364, design Karl Schwanzer, 1953; photo: Chevojon

cities.[19] Dr. Fritzjakob Thonet died in 1973. In 1975, the two Thonet families exchanged their shares, through which Thonet Germany and Thonet Austria were then separately owned. At the same time, however, they set up a pool agreement, which ensured mutual exclusivity. Thonet Germany was able to deliver to Austria only via Thonet Vienna and Thonet Vienna could deliver to Germany via Thonet Frankenberg. The children of the deceased Fritzjakob, Evamaria Schmertzing-Thonet, and Richard Thonet, took over the management. The company became known as Gebrüder Thonet Vienna.[20]

From 1976, the designer Ernst W. Beranek taught as a professor for product development at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. Beranek, a student of Oswald Haerdtl, was recruited as a designer by Thonet Vienna and in 1979/80 went on to create the multi-functional stacking chair program THONDO, which became a sales success, especially the version with steel feet. The collaboration with Beranek lasted about fifteen years and determined the appearance of Thonet Vienna for a long time. Among other things, Beranek created the product lines FINE FORMS and PLAZA with deliberate references to Viennese Modernism around 1900.[21] Other designs were also very successful on the market, such as the nostalgic design ART DECO and, for the contract use segment, the stackable and rowable bentwood product lines MEETING and NEW MEETING.

The successful expansion efforts in production, program development, and sales also required corresponding efforts in export. As of 1981, exhibitors were therefore present at the most important international trade fairs. The global market also demanded genuine bentwood classics from Thonet Vienna, which is why a re-edition of iconographic chairs from the company's long history was launched, and of course also the most well-known chair, model No. 14. However, it was not the execution from 1859–that model still had no leg ring–but the early series version from

19 Karl Mang, *Thonet Bugholzmöbel. Von der handwerklichen Fertigung zur industriellen Produktion*, Vienna 1982.

20 Heimo Keindl, "Das Unternehmen Gebrüder Thonet nach 1945", in: Exhib. Cat. Neuwied 2011: *Möbel Design. Roentgen, Thonet und die Moderne*, 223–229: 225.

21 Ch. Pauschitz, *Ernst W. Beranek*, Vienna 2017, 35ff.

Stuhlserie Fine Forms, Entwurf Ernst Beranek, 1985; Thonet-Katalog
1985 Chair series Fine Forms, design Ernst Beranek, 1985; Thonet catalog 1985

An der Universität für angewandte Kunst
Designer Ernst

the 1860s, with the leg brace.[22] In this series more relaunches followed; the so-called Viennese chair, No. 6009, which was used by Le Corbusier in many of his buildings in the 1920s, and also the very elaborately manufactured chair called "Café Museum," designed by Adolf Loos.[23] Otto Wagner's chair, armchair, and stool for the Austrian Postal Savings bank in Vienna were also produced again.[24]

But they also sought new designs. In 1993/94, a café-restaurant was installed in the premises of the MAK–Museum of Applied Arts–in Vienna. The planning was carried out by the famous architect and designer Hermann Czech. He designed a bentwood chair and armchair for this location, both of which are still in production today.[25]

Since there was discord within the Thonet family in Vienna in regard to the further financial management of the company and no agreement was reached, a German investment company was able to acquire the majority of shares in Thonet Vienna. The Thonet family withdrew from operative business. After a not very creative and financially dubious interlude, the company was finally sold to the prestigious upholstered furniture manufacturer Poltrona Frau in 2001.

In the 1980s, one had worked well together with this internationally recognized Italian company, but the partners from that time were no longer in the company or no longer actively operating. New models were supposed to be developed in Italy, but none of these chairs reached the point of mass production. The Italian managers, who were always dismissed quickly, unfortunately didn't know what to do with Thonet.

By 2006, Poltrona Frau's project with Gebrüder Thonet Vienna had failed. The Friedberg factory and the showrooms in Austria were closed and the company headquarters moved to Turin. For the first time in its history Gebrüder Thonet Vienna was a furniture company without its own production. This was followed by a so-called manager buyout. Franco Moschini, the former president of Poltrona Frau, was now responsible for the company. The current design company calls itself GTV Viennese Design due to the fact that it lacks the trademark rights to the name "Thonet". The current collection consists of the classic models of the Austrian era and ambitions attempts to create contemporary bentwood design.

Stuhlserie Thondo, Entwurf Ernst Beranek, 1979; Thonet-Katalog 1982 Chair series Thondo, design Ernst Beranek, 1979; Thonet catalog 1982

The Situation in Czechoslovakia and Poland after 1945

During the Second World War, representatives from the National Socialist Party took over the management of the factories located in Moravia and Slovakia. After the war, these factories were confiscated as "German property." For large companies, the new ownership was immediately reorganized by the state, with no regard for valid contracts. The same was done with the landowners and forestry enterprises. Starting in 1948, the "nationalization" took place. The socialist central administration in Prague carried out many restructurings and mergers, whereby the commodity-producing enterprises, such as forestry, were separated from the production and distribution.

The factories in Groß-Ugrócz and Vsetín had stopped producing bentwood already in the Interwar Period, while Koryčany and Halenkov stopped after the Second World War, although there was virtually no war damage in these factories. Bystřice, Gebrüder Thonet's second factory, was

22 Wolfgang Thillmann, *Perfektes Design Thonet No. 14*, Bielefeld 2015, 54.
23 Jiří Uhlíř, *Vom Wiener Stuhl zum Architektenmöbel. Jacob & Josef Kohn, Thonet und Mundus Bugholzmöbel vom Secessionismus bis zur Zwischenkriegsmoderne*, Vienna i.a. 2009, 74ff.
24 Christian Witt-Dörring, *Otto Wagner Möbel*, Vienna 1991, 20ff.
25 Exhib. Cat. Venice/Klagenfurt 1991: *13 Austrian Positions*, 49.

Stapelstuhlserie New Meeting, Entwurf Heimo Keindl, 1983; Thonet-Katalog 1983 Stacking chair series New Meeting, design Heimo Keindl, 1983; Thonet catalog 1983

Stuhl Art Deco, Entwurf Heimo Keindl, 1983; Thonet-Katalog 1985
Chair Art Deco, design Heimo Keindl, 1983; Thonet catalog 1985

always the most productive location for bentwood furniture production. After 1948, the Holešov factory–formerly J. & J. Kohn–, the competitors Bernkopf, in Frenštát pod Radhoštěm, Moravia, and Fischel, with the factory in Mimoň, North Bohemia, were assigned to the factory in Bystřice pod Hostýnem. Since the end of the war, bentwood furniture has been produced only in Bystřice. Trademarks forced the company to renounce the name "Thonet," which is why, as of 1953, it was registered as TON–Továrny Ohybáneho Nábytku, i.e. factories for bentwood furniture.

There were several changes in ownership. The distribution of exports was initially operated through the foreign trade company Ligna in Prague, from 1969 on through Drevouia in Bratislava. Since 1994, TON has been a limited company and sells its products directly on the domestic and foreign markets. After the privatization, great improvements in quality were achieved in the areas of wood drying and especially in surface treatment. In addition, bending and drying with high-frequency technology were also introduced. Some historic bentwood furniture is still included in today's product range, including the model numbers 14, 18, 6003, 6009, A 811, the coat stand, etc. However, the range also includes many new contemporary developments in bentwood, plywood, and solid wood. The quantity of bentwood in production is now approximately 40 per cent. It is noteworthy that there are virtually no chairs with steel parts. TON limits itself to pure wood production, still the products have certainly achieved an international level.

The Nowo-Radomsk factory, now located in Poland, built for commercial policy reasons in 1880, as well as the extensive forestry operations in former Galicia were nationalized after the end of the war. Today, the company named FAMEG is a corporation comparable in size to the Bystřice factory and has approximately 800 employees. Extensive investment has been made in recent years. The company continues to produce bentwood chairs from the classic series–models No. 14, 18, 6003, A 811, A 751, rocking chairs, and coat stands, etc.–and also many wooden chairs with

MAK-Café Wien, Entwurf Hermann Czech, 1993 MAK Café Vienna, design Hermann Czech, 1993

curved parts. FAMEG regularly exhibits its products at the international furniture fairs in Cologne and Milan.

Starting from 1868, after the "voluntarily forced return" of the Thonet solid wood patent, many competing companies have been founded. In the 1920s, most of them were united in the central Mundus AG holding company. Of these once so numerous smaller competitors, very few have survived until today, they bend almost exclusively two-dimensionally, and usually act as suppliers for the major manufacturers.

Sebastian Hackenschmidt
Wolfgang Thillmann

Bugholz, vielschichtig

Thonet und das moderne Möbeldesign

Bentwood and Beyond

Thonet and Modern Furniture Design

In den folgenden 101 Gegenüberstellungen wird das bis in die 1830er Jahre zurückreichende Thonet-Programm mit wichtigen Werken der Möbelgeschichte konfrontiert. Über eine chronologische Gesamtschau hinaus werden die charakteristischen Bugholz- und Stahlrohrmöbel des Unternehmens dabei in die technologische, typologische, stilistische und sozialgeschichtliche Entwicklung des modernen Möbeldesigns eingebettet. Ergänzt durch Leihgaben aus internationalen Sammlungen zeigt die vorliegende Publikation zur großen MAK-Ausstellung über 350 Exponate, die überwiegend neu fotografiert wurden.

Anhand archivalischer Unterlagen lässt sich die Herstellung verschiedener Sesselmodelle und anderer Bugholzmöbel bestimmten Thonetschen Fabriken zuordnen. So wurden beispielsweise die Modellnummern 1–7, 9, 12, 13, 16 und 17 ausschließlich in Koritschan erzeugt, während für die Modelle 8, 10 und 11 – falls und solange nach diesen eine größere Nachfrage bestand – auch in anderen Fabriken eine Produktion eingerichtet wurde. „Bestseller", wie die Nummern 14, 18, 20 und später 56 wurden hingegen durchgängig in allen Fabrikationsstandorten hergestellt. Wo dies eindeutig ist, wird im Folgenden nicht nur das Jahr (bzw. der Zeitraum) der Erzeugung angeben, sondern auch die erzeugende Fabrik. Die Angabe des Herstellungszeitraums wiederum orientiert sich an den Kennzeichnungen auf den Möbeln. Siehe hierzu die Tabellen „Wie alt ist mein Thonet-Sessel?" im Anhang. Die historischen Bezeichnungen für die Produkte wurden sowohl im Deutschen als auch im Englischen beibehalten, auch wenn sie heute nicht mehr ganz dem Sprachgebrauch entsprechen.

In the following 101 comparisons, the Thonet program, which dates back to the 1830s, is compared with many important works in the history of furniture design. Beyond a chronological overview, the main focus is on embedding the company's characteristic bentwood and tubular steel furniture in the technological, typological, stylistic, and socio-historical development of modern furniture design. Supplemented by loans from international collections, the present publication on the major MAK exhibition displays over 350 exhibits, many of which have been newly photographed.

Based on archival documents, the production of various chair models and other bentwood furniture can be assigned to certain Thonet factories. For example, the model numbers 1–7, 9, 12, 13, 16, and 17 were produced exclusively in Koryčany, while for the models 8, 10, and 11–if and as long as there was a greater demand for them–the production could also be carried out in other factories. In contrast, best-sellers such as numbers 14, 18, 20, and later 56, were consistently manufactured at all manufacturing sites. Where this is clear, not only the year (or period) of production will be indicated below, but also the factory of production. The indication of the production period, in turn, is based on the markings on the furniture. See the tables "How Old Is My Thonet Chair?" in the appendix. The historical names of the products have been retained in both German and English, even in cases where they no longer correspond to the terminology used today.

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Zweiteilige Seitenrahmenkonstruktion eines Bopparder Sessels
Two-part side frame construction of a Boppard chair

Gartensessel Garden Chair
Entwurf Design: Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Deutschland Germany, um ca. 1820/25
Ausführung Execution: verm. presumably Königliche Eisengießerei Sayner Hütte, Bendorf, um ca. 1830; Gusseisen, schmiedeeiserne Stäbe Cast iron, wrought iron bars; Sammlung Collection Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein

Salonsessel Nr. 2 Salon Chair No. 2
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1882
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1900; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid and bent, plywood; Sammlung Collection Werner

The so-called English chair, a common form of a side frame chair and model for Michael Thonet's Boppard chair, was widely used on the Middle Rhine in the 1830s.[1] Models comparable in form were also displayed in the *Journal für Möbelschreiner und Tapezierer* [The Joiners' and Upholsterers' Journal], one of the most important original pattern books of the time, published by the Mainz joiner Wilhelm Kimbel in 1835. Michael Thonet made the side parts of his chairs from two laminated components, which were glued together on a portion of the side frame; elaborate wood joints were omitted.[2] According to a contemporary exhibition report, the advantages of this method were "that the furniture can be given an exquisite lightness with both perfect durability and elegance."[3] As early as 1820, the architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel designed cast-iron garden chairs whose identical side panels could each be cast in one piece. As with Thonet's Boppard chair, in this way series production was already possible, whereby they could be assembled as benches using side panels with longer rods and as an armchair with casted side panels with armrests. Salon chair No. 2 from 1883, made entirely of solid bent wood, is reminiscent of the side frame construction of the early Boppard models.

1 Cf. Heidrun Zinnkann, *Mainzer Möbelschreiner der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt am Main 1985, 70ff.
2 By Samuel Gragg one finds chairs where a continuous component of massive bent wood forms the stile, the side rail and the front leg, already starting in 1808. Cf. Derek Ostergard (ed.), *Bent wood and metal furniture 1850–1946*, New York 1987, Catalog, Figure 3B and 4A.
3 Hektor Rößler, "Bericht über die allgemeine deutsche Industrieausstellung in Mainz im Jahr 1842," in: *Verhandlungen des Gewerbe-Vereins für das Großherzogthum Hessen*, Darmstadt 1843, 36.

Biegen in Schichten

Einfacher Bopparder Sessel Simple Boppard Chair
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, 1842–44
Ausführung Execution: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, Werkstatt Workshop List, 1842–44; Buche, schichtverleimt, Kirschfurnier, Weichholz, Geflecht Beech, laminated, cherry veneer, softwood, cane; MAK H 2991/1988; Schenkung Donation Franz Wittmann K.G.

Sessel Chair
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: Samuel Gragg, Boston, um ca. 1808; Esche, Nussbaum, massiv und gebogen Ash, walnut, solid and bent; MAK H 2933/1988

Fauteuil Armchair
Entwurf Design: Jean-Joseph Chapuis, Brüssel Brussels, um ca. 1803
Ausführung Execution: Jean-Joseph Chapuis, Werkstatt Brüssel Workshop Brussels, 1804–10; Nussbaum, massiv und schichtverleimt, Bronze, Geflecht Walnut, solid and laminated, bronze, cane; Roentgen-Museum Neuwied/Museumsstiftung Krüger

The seat and the backrest of the chair by Samuel Gragg are made of solid bent strips of ash wood. Little is known about Gragg's technique of bending the wood, and unfortunately his patent from 1808 has not survived.[1] The armchair by Jean-Joseph Chapuis and the chair by Michael Thonet, on the other hand, are made of laminated wood. However, the term "laminated" as a description is unspecific since it subsumes different approaches with the common aspect of bending and gluing aligned wood veneers in the same grain direction. Even before Michael Thonet's experiments with laminated veneers, it was customary to soften veneers or thin strips of wood by exposure to water or steam, to bend them, to glue them after drying, and to press them in a suitable mold. This traditional process, which Chapuis also used, was modified by Thonet and significantly improved to produce the individual components made of bentwood faster and more efficiently.[2]

1 Cf. Patricia Kane, "Samuel Gragg: 'His bentwood fancy chairs'," in: *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin*, Autumn 1971, 26–37.
2 This is stated in the French patent application from 1 July 1841: "[L]e bois qu'on veut rendre mou et flexible est jeté dans un bain de colle forte […]." And in summary, a little later: "Ainsi la forme est donnée en même temps que le collage s'opère, avantage d'autant plus précieux que la mollesse qu'elles ont acquise par le bain facilité extraordinairement le travail." This new method made it possible to produce bentwood components faster and more efficiently than before. "De cette sorte le travail est extrêmement rapide, les chaises sons toutes identiques de formes et dimensions." Transcription of the patent in: Robin Rehm / Christoph Wagner (eds.), *Designpatente der Moderne 1840–1970*, Berlin 2019, 417–419.

The furnishing concept of the palaces in Vienna in the first half of the 19th century also included the so-called "running chairs," which complemented the representative furniture as light occasional furniture when needed and which were constantly rearranged. Such light and thus rather inexpensive seating furniture was made by Michael Thonet for the Liechtenstein, Schwarzenberg, and possibly also Pálffy Palais. However, Thonet's first attempt to create a chair in the style of his Boppard chairs, but adapted to the taste of metropolitan Vienna was not really successful: The principle of the side frame chair can be seen here only in the base frame, because for the first time the crest rail and the rear stiles should be one single continuous component. This required a three-dimensional bend, which could be made only as an independent element and then had to be mounted on the lower part. Although the problem could be mastered technically, the chair itself was still too much rooted in the Biedermeier form canon and could not convince in terms of form. It was finally with the chairs designed by the English architect Peter Hubert Desvignes for the Palais Liechtenstein–including the model with a heart-shaped medallion in the back shown here[1]–that Michael Thonet was able to aesthetically exploit the bending technique he had developed. In comparison, the chairs by Carl Leistler, who had been entrusted with all the woodwork for the Palais Liechtenstein, and whose workshop Thonet was using at that time for doing his own work, were also executed using templates by Desvignes but still look rather crude: They show "how Desvignes' traditional Rococo models [...] are put into a new, fashionably renewed dress."[2]

1 A comparable model can also be found in the Danhauser furniture designs. See *Musterkatalog der Danhauser'schen Möbelfabrik in Wien*, Vienna, no year, No. 96.

2 Michael Huey, *Peter Hubert Desvignes und die Neo-Rokoko-Gestaltung des Stadtpalais Liechtenstein 1837–1849*, Vienna 1999, 238.

Von der Palais-Ausstattung zum Serienm

Sessel Chair für for Palais Liechtenstein
Entwurf Design: Peter Hubert Desvignes / Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, 1844–47
Ausführung Execution: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, Werkstatt Workshop Leistler, 1844–49; Palisander, stab-/schichtverleimt und massiv, geschnitzt, gepolstert Rosewood, rod bundles/laminated and solid, carved, upholstered; MAK LHG 1637/1988; Dauerleihgabe Fürstliche Sammlungen Permanent loan The Princely Collections Liechtenstein

Prince Alois II of Liechtenstein traveled to England several times in the mid-1830s, where he met, among others, the architect Peter Hubert Desvignes. After the death of his father, Prince Alois took over the business in 1836 and in the following year commissioned Desvignes with the redesigning of the baroque Liechtenstein Majorat House on Vienna's Bankgasse in the style of the Second Rococo.[1] With Michael Thonet, who had come to Vienna in 1842, the English architect—who was responsible not only for the redesigning of the Palais but also for the new furniture—recognized the great innovation potential which was offered by the privileged technique of bending veneers or thin strips of wood to produce curved shapes: Desvignes commissioned Thonet with the production of parquet floors and various types of light occasional chairs. One of these so-called running chairs had a heart-shaped back medallion—a motif that is found a few years later in a chair from the 1850s, which has a spirally built seat frame and is, with the exception of the front legs, made entirely of laminated wood. In the mid-1850s, the series model No. 3 with caned seat and backrest emerged from this archetype.[2]

1 The "decision for an English architect in the 1830s apparently [implied] the decision for the 'Louis Quatorze-Revival' as a representative furnishing style." Lieselotte Hanzl / Eva B. Ottillinger, *Kaiserliche Interieurs*, Vienna et al. 1997, 287. See also Johann Kräftner, *Das Stadtpalais der Liechtenstein*, Vienna 2015.

2 Above all, the so-called "luxury models," such as the No. 6 and No. 13—also called "eye chairs" ["Augensessel"] in the internal communication of the Thonet company due to the front leg design—were also offered with the option of upholstery.

Sessel Nr. 3 Chair No. 3
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1850
Ausführung Execution: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, Werkstatt Workshop Gumpendorf, um ca. 1850; Buche und Esche, schichtverleimt und massiv, gepolstert Beech and ash, laminated and solid, upholstered; Privatsammlung Private Collection

Sessel Nr. 3 Chair No. 3
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1850
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1865, Koritschan Koryčany; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 2175-2/1969; Schenkung Bundeskammer der gewerblichen Wirtschaft Donation Federal Chamber of Commerce

Stabverleimter Vorderfuß eines Liechtensteiner Sessels Rod bundles, front leg of a Liechtenstein chair

Laminated Rod Bundles

The technique of laminated veneers as used in the Boppard chairs and armchairs, allowed only the production of two-dimensional components, since due to the wood structure strips and strip bundles can only be bent on the broad side. Therefore, a new method had to be found for three-dimensional bends as were required for the production of the Liechtenstein chairs.[1] Instead of rectangular strips, Michael Thonet took matchstick like rods with a lateral dimension of 2–3 millimeters. As a result, the bending direction was no longer prescribed by the wood cross section, because the rods could be formed in all directions. A similar, but much more technologically advanced process was used by Thonet Frankenberg for the "Comprimo" model in the 1980s: "In the thread wood technique thin wood threads are glued under pressure. With this new material structure it is possible to blend different cross-sections into one another," it said in a promotional brochure from the company in 1989.[2] The extremely elaborate thread wood chair made using this technique consists of only three load-bearing parts, but was not able to succeed on the market–the production was discontinued already in 1992.

1 The invention of this new technique–bending of laminated rod bundles–has a close technical connection with parquet production. See Thillmann, *Perfektes Design Thonet Nr. 14*, Bielefeld 2015, 15 ff.

2 Thonet advertising brochure Comprimo, Model No. 89, Design: Wolfgang Müller-Deisig, 1989.

Fadenholzsessel Nr. 89 Thread Wood Chair No. 89 PV „Comprimo"
Entwurf Design: Wolfgang Müller-Deisig, Deutschland Germany, 1988
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Frankenberg, 1990–92; Pappelfadenholz, Sperrholz, gepolstert
Poplar threadwood, plywood, upholstered; Thonet Frankenberg

Von der Palais-Ausstattung zum Serienmöbel: Schwarzenberg

„Schlangensessel“ “Snake Chair” für for Palais Liechtenstein
Entwurf Design: Peter Hubert Desvignes / Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, 1844–49
Ausführung Execution: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, 1844–58; Palisander, stab-/schichtverleimt und massiv, geschnitzt, gepolstert Rosewood, rod bundles/ laminated and solid, carved, upholstered; Fürstliche Sammlungen The Princely Collections Liechtenstein

Sessel Chair für for Palais Schwarzenberg
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1850
Ausführung Execution: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, Werkstatt Workshop Gumpendorf, um ca. 1850; Buche, schichtverleimt und massiv, Geflecht Beech, laninated and solid, cane; Firmensammlung Company Collection TON

From Palace Furnishings to Standard Series Furniture: Schwarzenberg

Sessel Nr. 1 Chair No. 1
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1850
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, um ca. 1861;
Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 2299/1975

Sessel Nr. 1 Chair No. 1
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1850
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, um ca. 1880;
Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 2173/1969;
Schenkung Bundeskammer der gewerblichen Wirtschaft Donation Federal Chamber of Commerce

The redesign of the Palais Liechtenstein in the mid-1840s caused a sensation in Vienna: Other princes also had their residences refurbished and remodeled. At that time, the standard furnishing of a prestigious residence included the so-called running chair, whereby the models that Michael Thonet had made for the Palais Liechtenstein were unquestionably the most advanced of their time. The wood-faced model shown here, in which the rear legs, stiles and the serpent motif on the back already form a continuous line[1], is an important starting point for the development of Thonet chairs into mass-produced serial products. Still, the rear support system is not bent from a single part; rather, it consists of two vertically mirror-symmetric parts, which are connected to each other in the lower section of the snake motif. The armchair for the Gartenpalais Schwarzenberg, which was first proven in 1850, represents a decisive further development: The Liechtenstein chair's backrest motif was executed here as an independent element and the laminated crest rail is attached to the solid rear stiles. Derived from the Schwarzenberg chair and offered from the second half of the 1850s onwards, Model No. 1 was even optimized for series production: The rear support system–legs, stiles, and crest rail–are, for the first time, made of a single rod. A veneer layer was inserted inside the crest rail to strengthen this construction. It wasn't until 1861/62 that this component, as with all production models, could be bent completely with solid wood.[2]

1 The same snake motif can be found in a chair from the Danhauser furniture factory. Cf. *Musterkatalog der Danhauser'schen Möbelfabrik in Wien*, Vienna, no year, Model No. 32. Michael Huey makes reference to an English model in *Peter Hubert Desvignes und die Neo-Rokoko-Gestaltung des Stadtpalais Liechtenstein 1837–1849*, Vienna 1999, 247, Fig. 186.

2 For the transitional period from 1856 to 1861 see also Thillmann, *Perfektes Design Thonet Nr. 14*, Bielefeld 2015, 37–44.

This type of so-called "snake chair" was the lightest piece of furniture that Michael Thonet created for the Palais Liechtenstein. Although this chair did not–as research has repeatedly suggested–have to be weighted with a lead band so that it would not overturn at the slightest touch, the leg ring, attached in an unusually low position, shows that this extremely graceful piece of furniture was believed to need an additional stabilizing element.[1] Although not all chairs were as light as this one, Thonet's bentwood furniture increasingly became competition for the equally graceful and elegant Italian Chiavari chairs.[2] To reduce the weight these chairs were mainly made of regional woods and provided with a rush seat, while their wood cross-sections were reduced as much as possible. In spite of their cost-effective manufacturing–the items were made in piece-work in rural homes, centrally collected, and then assembled[3]–the Chiavari chairs on the market could not keep up with the increasingly industrially produced bentwood furniture. When designing his classicist running chair for furnishing Hernstein Castle around 1870, the architect Theophil Hansen relied on the lightweight Chiavari chairs, but he was not concerned with reducing the weight as much as possible: His chair has a conventional seat frame, with a solid seating board on which Viennese cane has been placed. The Chiavari chairs also used weave for covering the seats, but this was laid with so-called twill weave around four thin side bars to form a very light but firm seat.

1 "Due to their lightness, some chairs were weighted with a lead band which was screwed on under the front edge of the seat." Alexander von Vegesack, *Das Thonet Buch*, Munich 1987, 38. We did not find a lead band or anything similar under any of the seats of the chairs we examined.

2 The name of these chairs derives from the Italian town of Chiavari, which was the center of their production. See Franco Casoni / Jacopo Casoni, *Le Sedie Leggere di Chiavari*, Genova 2011.

3 Friendly hint from Achim Werner.

Fauteuil Armchair für for Palais Pálffy
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1865
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1865; Buche, Nuss, schichtverleimt und massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, nut, laminated and solid bent, cane; Firmensammlung Company Collection TON

Sessel Chair für for Palais Pálffy
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1865
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1865; Buche, Nuss, schichtverleimt und massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, nut, laminated and solid bent, cane; MAK H 3010/1988

From Palace Furnishings to Standard Series Furniture: Pálffy

Sessel Nr. 22 Chair No. 22
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1873
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, 1880er Jahre 1880s; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane;
MAK H 2909/ 1987

To date, there is no reliable proof that the so-called Pálffy chairs were actually made specifically for the Pálffy family in Vienna. What one can say for sure, however, is that these models, which were made at the earliest in the mid-1860s, were taken over for general sale, although they were depicted neither on the early posters nor in the first catalogs. On a photograph of the Thonet stand at the World Fair in Philadelphia in 1876, on which several luxuriously upholstered chairs, an armchair, and a sofa can be seen, is so far the only known historical proof of this model.[1] Chair No. 22, offered as of 1873, has a back design which is identical to that of the Pálffy models. Their technically sophisticated front leg construction can be executed only in the technique of laminated wood. With No. 22 the front legs were replaced by solid ones inserted into the seat frame as in the standard models in general. Another special feature of the Pálffy models is the shape of the armrests of the armchair and sofa: Their double curved form is much more elaborate than that of series model No. 22, which–like all other classic armchairs with trapezoidal seat frame–received a type of armrest with the tapering volute.[2]

1 The photo of the Philadelphia World Fair also features a chair with a caned seat and backrest; unfortunately seen only from the back, so that it is not clear whether it is the Pálffy model or the No. 22.
2 Only the salon armchair and its respective sofa, offered as of 1886, still has this characteristic double curved form of the armrests. However, there is a similar armrest form already on a drawing from the French patent application for the Boppard furniture from 1 July 1841. See also Alexander von Vegesack, *Das Thonet Buch*, Munich 1987, 14.

Möbel der Gebrüder Thonet auf der Weltausstellung Philadelphia 1876 Furniture from Gebrüder Thonet at the 1876 World Fair in Philadelphia

Michael Thonet vs. Carl Leistler

Sessel Chair für for Palais Liechtenstein
Entwurf Design: Peter Hubert Desvignes / Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, 1844–47
Ausführung Execution: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, Werkstatt Workshop Leistler, 1844–49; Palisander, stab-/schichtverleimt und massiv, geschnitzt, gepolstert Rosewood, rod bundles/laminated and solid, carved, upholstered; Fürstliche Sammlungen The Princely Collections Liechtenstein

Sessel Chair für for Palais Liechtenstein
Entwurf Design: Peter Hubert Desvignes, Wien Vienna, 1843–47
Ausführung Execution: Carl Leistler, Wien Vienna, 1843–47; Mahagoni, geschnitzt, gepolstert Mahogany, carved, upholstered; MAK LHG 1638/1988; Dauerleihgabe Fürstliche Sammlungen Permanent loan The Princely Collections Liechtenstein

Schon bei der von Peter Hubert D

Fauteuil Armchair, präsentiert auf der Weltausstellung 1851
presented at the 1851 World Fair in London
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, 1850; Ausführung Execution: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, Werkstatt Workshop Gumpendorf, ab ca. 1851; Palisander, stab-/schichtverleimt, Messingstreifen, Geflecht Rosewood, rod bundles/laminated, brass strips, cane; Firmensammlung Company Collection TON

Fauteuil Armchair, präsentiert auf der Weltausstellung 1851
presented at the 1851 World Fair in London
Entwurf Design: Carl Leistler, Wien Vienna, 1850
Ausführung Execution: Carl Leistler, Wien Vienna, 1850; Esche, gepolstert
Ash, upholstered; MAK H 2730/1983

The furniture designed by Peter Hubert Desvignes for the Palais Liechtenstein in Vienna in the mid-1840s had already shown that Michael Thonet was able to combine representative requirements with modern lightness and elegance, thanks to his innovative bending technology. In contrast to the stylistic balance of Thonet's running chairs, the chairs Carl Leistler produced for the Palais Liechtenstein seem downright clumsy and awkward. This was all the more evident at the 1851 World Fair in London: As a part of a complete set of furniture which was offered for the first time, Michael Thonet presented a slender armchair as a new and inexpensive piece of furniture, and therewith completely freed himself from the stylistic escapades of the Second Rococo.[1] Carl Leistler, on the other hand, came to the Great Exhibition with exhibits[2] displaying an expansive opulence, which corresponded to the massive armchair from the same period shown here and whose impression was described in a contemporary report: "In the rooms where Leistler from Vienna has set up his splendid furniture, which is only too richly decorated, it is never empty. You cannot see anything richer in woodcarving, as it is wasted on every piece here. It is only too much, much too much."[3] The Thonet furniture was received quite differently, not least because of its low price: "The rosewood furniture by M. Thonet of Vienna, mostly with inlaid work in boulle, tortoiseshell, mother-of-pearl, and the like were quite excellent. A rosewood sofa together with armchairs and 6 chairs at the price of 407 Fl. in particular seemed extremely cheap. Thonet's chairs, partly of bent wood, received special attention from the jury."[4]

1 Cf. Marianne Zweig, *Zweites Rokoko*, Vienna 1924.
2 The Leistler exhibits–the furnishings of an antechamber, a dining room for 36 people, a library, and a bedroom–were designed by the architect Bernardo di Bernardis.
3 Friedrich Wilhelm Hackländer, "London 1851 – Weltausstellung," Chapter 3: Der Kristallpalast, 34, in: *Krieg und Frieden*, Vol. 2, Stuttgart 1859, cited from http://www.fw-hacklaender.de/pdf/.
4 *Amtlicher Bericht über die Industrie-Ausstellung aller Völker zu London im Jahre 1851*, Third and last part, Berlin 1853, 415.

Tisch Table, präsentiert auf der Weltausstellung 1851
presented at the 1851 World Fair in London
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, 1850
Ausführung Execution: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, *Werkstatt* Workshop
Gumpendorf, ab ca. 1851; Palisander, *stabverleimt mit Messingstreifen* Rosewood,
rod bundles with brass strips; Platte mit Schildpatt, *Messing und Edelholz* eingelegt;
table top inlaid with tortoiseshell, brass and precious wood; *Firmensammlung*
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Sessel Chair, präsentiert auf der Weltausstellung 1851 presented at the 1851 World Fair in London
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, 1850
Ausführung Execution: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, Werkstatt Gumpendorf, ab Herbst as of 1850;
Palisander, stab-/schichtverleimt, Messingstreifen, Geflecht Rosewood, rod bundles/laminated,
brass strips, cane; Firmensammlung Company Collection TON

Sessel Nr. 2 Chair No. 2
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1850
Ausführung Execution: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, Werkstatt Workshop Gumpendorf, um ca. 1850;
Buche, schichtverleimt und massiv, Geflecht Beech, laminated and solid, cane; MAK H 3013/1988

These two versions of the Thonet chair No. 2 exemplify the technical and formal changes that led to the final and optimized model for industrial production over a period of approximately 30 years. The copy without the leg ring was made in the early 1850s in the Viennese workshop in Gumpendorf. It bears the embossed stamp on the underside of the seat frame: "Thonet Wien Gump. 396."[1] Except for the front legs, all components are still laminated. In contrast, the later large-scale series model is completely made of solid wood and already shows all the technical improvements introduced in the late 1870s in terms of stability, practicality, and durability: The leg ring used as of 1861 and the reinforcement braces between the outer side of the seat and the rear stiles as well as consoles under the seat frame, introduced in about 1875.[2] For the trapezoidal frames, the lateral scarf joint was abandoned; instead they were fastened—as well as the circular frames—by means of blocks, starting from the mid-1870s: To reduce the tension in the frame construction, it was cut open between the rear legs and two thirds of the outside width was cut away. A suitable piece of wood was then mounted from the outside as a block which was glued and screwed to the frame.[3]

1 This stamp, which was placed on all furniture produced for general sale, gives the company name and the address of the workshop established in Vienna in May 1849: "Gumpendorf, Hauptstraße Nr. 396." With the recording of the company Gebrüder Thonet the label "GB. THONET Wien" was used as of 1854 and this continued to be used until the early 1860s.
2 These consoles increase the height of the seat frame and allow for longer tenons in the front legs and enlarge the contact surface of the rear legs with the seat ring.
3 Cf. illustration No. 3 in: Karl Mang, *Thonet Bugholzmöbel*, Vienna 1982, 46.

Sessel Nr. 2 Chair No. 2
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1850
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, nach after 1875; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 2174/1969; Schenkung Bundeskammer der gewerblichen Wirtschaft Donation Federal Chamber of Commerce

Michael Thonet's chairs for the Palais Liechtenstein and his exhibits for the World Fair in London were produced as luxury furniture made of rosewood or mahogany–although for economic reasons their "core" was already made of beech.[1] Through the invention of bending solid wood the use of precious and expensive woods was made completely obsolete. Beech wood was available in large quantities and ideally suited for bending, but had previously been used only as firewood and therefore could be procured cheaply. However, one did not want to completely renounce the appearance of being valuable. As the poster from 1867 states: „All these pieces of furniture are made of beech wood and can, if desired, be polished in their natural color or made to imitate the look of either walnut, rosewood, or mahogany." At the end of the 19th century, "black (ebony)-like imitation, polished, nut dulled and black dulled, oak, old oak, and nut dulled grained" were added.[2] For larger orders, other surfaces were created on request, as in the gold-colored chair No. 13 shown here.[3] Some series models could be decorated by incising and given additional emphasis with bronze paint at additional cost.

1 Brass inlays were used in the World Furniture Fair in 1851, while the tabletops also had tortoiseshell and mother-of-pearl surrogates. It was not so much about simulating materials as it was about demonstrating that one was capable of producing deceptively genuine-looking surrogates.

2 See the preface to the Gebrüder Thonet sales catalog from 1904.

3 The chair probably was part of the furnishings of the Palais Schwarzenberg in Vienna which was built for Archduke Ludwig Viktor Schwarzenberg in the 1860s. (Friendly hint from Heimo Keindl.)

Sessel Nr. 39 Chair No. 39
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1887
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, 1888–1900; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid and bent, cane; Privatsammlung Private Collection

Sessel Nr. 13 Chair No. 13
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1860
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, um ca. 1865; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; Sammlung Collection Heimo Keindl

Prototypen und Demonstrationsobjekte

Fauteuil Armchair
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: Jean-Joseph Chapuis, Brüssel Brussels, 1803/4; Nussbaum, massiv und schichtverleimt, Bronze, Geflecht Walnut, solid and laminated, bronze, cane; Privatsammlung Private Collection

Sessel Nr. 6 Chair No. 6
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1850
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Wien Vienna, 1850er Jahre 1850s; Buche, stab-/schichtverleimt Beech, rod bundles/laminated; Technisches Museum Wien Vienna

Prototypes serve to give a first "real" impression of an object. For example, Jean-Joseph Chapuis' prototype of the armchair for the Palais Laeken in Brussels already largely corresponds to the later standard model, but displays some constructional features that were not adopted for series production. The u-shaped bracket between the rear legs, which was designed to prevent the tilting of the seat, and the stabilizing connection between the front legs were replaced with triangular wooden boards mounted under the seat in the perfected model. The Gebrüder Thonet chair shown here, however, is not a prototype in the true sense, since this piece of furniture was never meant to be produced in this form. Rather, it is a kind of demonstration object, in which the various technical options for individual components have been worked out.[1] We find variations of the laminated veneer and the rod bundle technique as well as many corrections, repairs, and additions, which were probably executed at different times. Not really exact, provisional cuts in the seat frame also make it clear that originally the chair was intended to be built with front legs in other dimensions. The two models also make it clear that in this time the design and execution of the furniture were still largely in the same hands. However, in the industrial age, craftsmen with special skills were successively replaced by "designers," who mainly designed for machine production and had little to do with the execution of the furniture itself. In this sense, prototypes today can often be regarded as three-dimensional sketches of ideas, such as the design for a "space chair," which the designer group POLKA presented in 2009 as part of the MAK exhibition *The Shape of the Café to Come* curated by Gregor Eichinger: Made from cheap and easy-to-process foam, the model is an experimental evolution of Thonet's No. 14, the epitome of the coffee-house chair.

1 A comprehensive description of the design as well as detailed photographs can be found in: Thillmann, *Schichten*, Munich 2018, 36 ff.

„Raumstuhl" "Space Chair"
Entwurf Design: POLKA, Wien Vienna, 2009;
Wood Plastic Composite, weiß lackiert painted white;
MAK DS 99/2010; Schenkung der Künstlerinnen
Donation from the artists

Zwei schichtverleimte Tische

Tisch Table
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: Jean-Joseph Chapuis, Brüssel Brussels, um ca. 1810; Nussbaum, massiv und schichtverleimt, Mahagonifurnier, Eiche, Bronze Walnut, solid and laminated, mahogany veneer, oak, bronze; Tischplatte: Marmor tabletop: marble; Roentgen-Museum Neuwied/ Museumsstiftung Krüger

Salontisch Nr. 1 Salon Table No. 1
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1855
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Werkstatt Mollardmühle Mollardmühle Workshop / Fabrik Koritschan Koryčany Factory, nach after 1855; Buche, massiv gebogen und verleimt, Eiche; Beech, solid bent and laminated, oak; Tischplatte furniert veneered tabletop; Thonet Frankenberg

The laminated veneer technique made it possible to manufacture curved components for all types of furniture faster, more durable, and more economically than traditional methods of craftsmanship. An example of this is the classicist table by Jean-Joseph Chapuis.[1] While the design of the frame, base plate, and the gold plated bronze applications meet the standard of high-quality furniture of the time, the legs are executed using a completely new technology: Twenty-seven walnut veneers were bent to form a c-shaped table leg. Natural-colored and black-colored veneers are arranged alternately; the top and bottom of the table legs are covered with mahogany veneer. The natural-colored veneers are not uniformly strong, but are rather tapered from approximately 3.5 millimeters to just one millimeter directly under the frame. However, the thickness of the black-colored veneers of approximately 0.5 millimeters is maintained throughout.[2] In contrast to Chapuis' furniture, the Thonet table is supported by four identical feet, each consisting of four individually bent and subsequently glued wooden strips. Michael Thonet used this procedure in the years from about 1855 to 1861; as with his chairs, he used thin wooden strips of increasing or decreasing thickness depending on the radius to be bent. By 1861/62 he had developed his method so far that all parts could be bent massively.

1 An earlier table, presumably made in France, which also has laminated components, is shown in: Thillmann, *Schichten*, Munich 2018, 20 f.
2 Cf. ibid., 22 ff.

Platte des Tischchens Top of Small Table, präsentiert auf der Weltausstellung 1851 presented at the 1851 World Fair in London
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, 1850
Ausführung Execution: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, Werkstatt Workshop Gumpendorf, ab Herbst as of Fall 1850; Palisander, Edelhölzer, Schildpatt, Messing auf Eiche Rosewood, precious woods, tortoiseshell, brass on oak; Thonet Frankenberg

As we know from illustrations, the larger of the two tables shown here was on display at the 1851 World Fair in London; the smaller one, on the other hand, is likely one of the pieces of furniture exhibited at the 1855 World Fair in Paris. There, for the last time, Gebrüder Thonet presented luxury furniture on an international stage–the company had already taken the decisive step towards utilitarian furniture.[1] As there are no illustrations

of the Paris exhibition, we rely on the descriptions of the exhibited furniture: "In the French capital," says Hermann Heller, "Thonet caused a sensation with two tables and three parquet panels, in which strips of bent wood were inserted in the most beautiful and varied entanglements."[2] One of these two tables mentioned by Heller is probably the smaller table shown here: Its spirally twisted column was too weak to support the top and therefore had to be reinforced inside with an iron bar wrapped in veneer. The ornamentation of the table top corresponds to the parquet No. XIII, as it is depicted on a Gebrüder Thonet poster, probably from the 1850s. In 1868 this pattern was installed as real parquet flooring in the ballroom of the Palais Larisch-Mönnich in Vienna, which is now the Iraqi Embassy.

1 "M. Thonet of Vienna, [...] whose chairs and tables made of bentwood, united the important requisites of elegance simplicity, lightness strength and cheapness in an eminent degree." *Reports on the Paris Universal Exhibition*, London 1856, 314.

2 Hermann Heller, *Von der kleinen Tischlerwerkstätte zum Weltindustriehaus*, Brno 1926, 23.

Tischchen Small Table, präsentiert auf der Weltausstellung 1851
presented at the 1851 World Fair in London
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, 1850
Ausführung Execution: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, Werkstatt Workshop Gumpendorf, ab Herbst as of Fall 1850; Palisander, stabverleimt, Messing Rosewood, rod bundles, brass; Thonet Frankenberg

Tischchen Small Table, vermutl. präsentiert auf der Weltausstellung 1855
presumably presented at the 1855 World Fair in Paris
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, Wien Vienna, 1854
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Werkstatt Mollardmühle Mollardmühle Workshop, 1854; Gestell: Buche, schichtverleimt, Eisenguss, Blei Frame: Beech, laminated, cast iron, lead Tischplatte: Palisander, Edelhölzer, Messing auf Eiche (Parkettmuster Nr. XIII en miniature); Tabletop: Rosewood, precious woods, brass on oak (parquet pattern No. XIII in miniature); MAK H 3937/2018

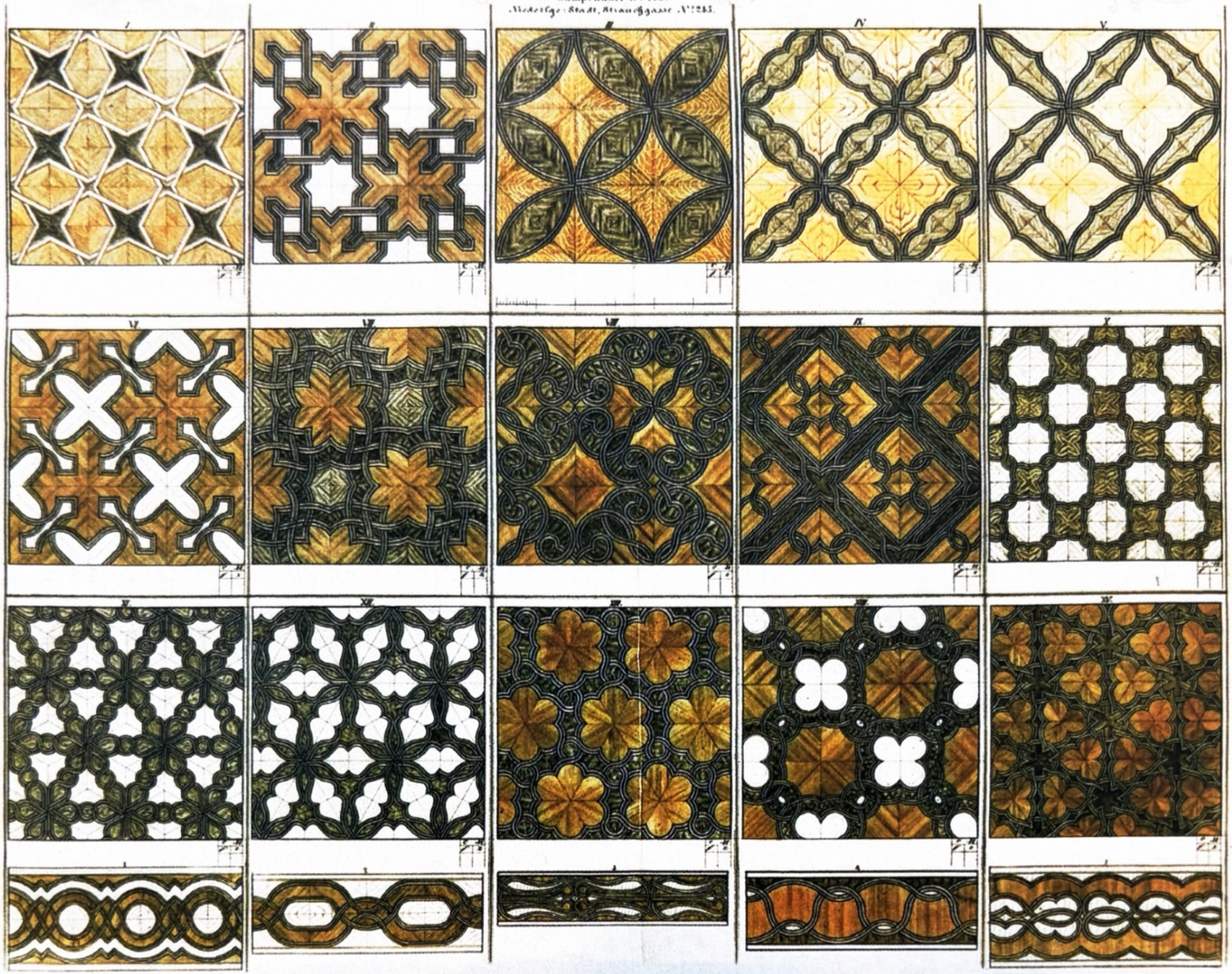
K. K. ausschl. privil. Fabrik von Möbeln aus gebogenem Holze
und Parquetten

GEBRÜDER THONET

WIEN

Gumpendorf № 113.

Niederlage: Stadt, Stranefsgasse № 245.



The economic success of Gebrüder Thonet did not go unnoticed in Vienna–and already by the middle of the 1850s the first competitors appeared. However, the technique of the bending of solid wood developed by Thonet was protected by the privilege of 1856. For this reason, until the "voluntarily forced return"[1] of the patent, the competitors still had to use the laminated veneer technique to manufacture all the curved components of their furniture. These components were joined to the parts cut from solid wood using labor-intensive scarf joints. In particular, the four-part seat construction of the competitors, with its over- and under-lapping technique, was much more complex than Thonet's solidly bent seat frame. Competitors such as Josef Neyger, Johann Kukol, Johann Weiss and Donat Kramer mainly copied the classic Gebrüder Thonet models, but also tried over and over again with other means to make life for the Thonets as hard as possible.[2] Some of them continued to produce for some time after the patent had expired, but they were still unable to keep up with Thonet's industrial production due to outdated manufacturing techniques and their small size. Only companies such as J. & J. Kohn and D. G. Fischel Sons, who were able to afford the mechanical equipment required for bending solid wood furniture due to their financial means, subsequently became serious competitors.

1 See chapter "Ende des Thonet'schen Monopols," in: Jiří Uhlíř, *Vom Wiener Stuhl zum Architektenmöbel*, Vienna 2009, 15–23.
2 Cf. Helmut Lang, "Biegen oder Brechen," in: *Parnass*, Special Issue 4, Vienna 1987, 56–67.

Sessel Nr. 14 Chair No. 14
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1859
Ausführung Execution: unbekannt unknown, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1865; Buche, schichtverleimt und massiv, Geflecht Beech, laminated and solid, cane; MAK H 2981/1987

The earliest examples of chair No. 8 from the mid-1850s were made using solid bent parts, based on the new manufacturing process that Gebrüder Thonet used from that time on. In this model the rear legs are cut centrally and transversely to the bending direction to about 100 mm above the seat ring. As a result, the bending process is made easier, since you then have two parts, each with half the material thickness. After drying, the rear leg was glued again, which also helped to hold the slightly outwardly bent shape better. In this model, the rear support system, inner splat, and seat ring are already all completely bent from solid wood, in other models from the same period, we still sometimes find two-piece constructions or a solid seat ring made of three individual bent parts. In contrast to all the other models, Model No. 8, for the first time, has a back motif, which does not fulfill a decorative function, but rather serves a practical purpose: The u-shaped splat stabilizes the back. By using a scarf joint to connect the splat with the rear stiles it is given the appearance of an organically grown element. The functional aspect of this additional stabilizer is therewith hidden. It wasn't until the beginning of the 1860s that the u-shaped splat has been butt-joined to the stiles and simply secured with screws just as was done in all the other models. Chair No. 14, with its circular seat and without the capitals on the front legs, could be described as a simplified version of No. 8, which was also still being produced. Finally, as of fall 1861, all chairs and armchairs had the leg ring, fundamentally solving the chair's stability problem.[1]

1 For information on the basic technological development, cf. Thillmann, *Perfektes Design Thonet Nr. 14*, Bielefeld 2015.

Sessel Nr. 8 Chair No. 8
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1855
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, Bistritz Bystřice, Ugrósz, um ca. 1870; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 2300/1975

The Successful Café Chair

Sessel Nr. 18 Chair No. 18
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1875
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, Bistritz Bystřice, Wsetin Vsetín, Ugrósz, Radomsk, Frankenberg, um ca. 1900; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane;
MAK H 2182-1/1969; Schenkung Bundeskammer der gewerblichen Wirtschaft Donation Federal Chamber of Commerce

Model Number	Quantity 1876	Quantity 1885	Price 1885/Gulden
Chair 1	1 205	1 352	4.50
Chair 2	2 385	960	5.50
Chair 3	2 600	3 462	6.25
Chair 4	6 205	4 067	6.00
Chair 5	553	787	7.00
Chair 6	198	220	10.00
Chair 7	2 671	2 413	6.50
Chair 8	5 188	4 204	3.75
Chair 9	66	no longer produced	–
Chair 10	11 675	3 526	4.00
Chair 11	17 274	13 047	5.00
Chair 12	1 776	1 475	7.50
Chair 13	187	105	8.50
Chair 14	326 797	335 161	3.00
Chair 15	17 403	22 475	4.00
Chair 16	381	540	9.00
Chair 17	2 408	1 774	6.50
Chair 18	35 089	151 051	3.10
Chair 19	–	21 948	4.00
Chair 20	54 955	52 291	3.25
Total number of chairs with trapezoidal seat rings	54.772	37 607	
Total number of chairs with circular seat rings (also 14 ½, 15 ½ and 18 ½)	434 244	640 260	

In the second half of the 19th century, bentwood chairs became a key factor in the furnishing of semi-public spaces: As countless photographs and postcards from all over Europe and far beyond document, inexpensive and practical seating furniture increasingly found its way into the cafés and taverns, garden restaurants, barracks, offices, and clubs–not only in Europe, but also on the other continents. Indeed, in 1851 the bentwood chairs began their triumphant advance in Vienna with the establishment of Anna Daum's café at the Kohlmarkt, at the corner of Wallnerstraße.[1] Model No. 14 is usually seen as the epitome of the coffee house chair, although of course other Thonet chairs were also used. After all, it can be seen, for example, from the production figures of Thonet bentwood chairs from 1876 and 1885, that Model No. 14, as well as the successor models with circular seat frames, were responsible for Gebrüder Thonet's economic success. Model No. 18, manufactured first in Bystřice pod Hostýnem from 1876, developed into a major source of revenue along with No. 14. The prices in the table below make it easy to see that Thonet's best-selling models were the least expensive ones.[2]

1 "[I]n Daum's café at the Kohlmarkt, we have to furnish the entire front room facing the street." Letter from Michael Thonet Jr. to his friend Jakob Henrich in Boppard from 15 August 1851, quoted from: Ulrich Löber, "Jakob Henrich, Schreinermeister aus Boppard," in: Exhib. Cat. Koblenz, 1996: *Thonet, Biegen oder Brechen*, 35–49: 41.

2 "Gesammtabsendungen in den 30 Jahren 1857–1886," [All deliveries in the 30 years from 1857–1886] Archiv Thillmann/ Archiv Keindl.

Bopparder Kanapee Boppard Sofa
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Boppard, um ca. 1836; Ausführung Execution: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, Werkstatt Workshop List, 1842–44; Buche, schichtverleimt, Ahorn, Weichholz, Nussfurnier, Geflecht Beech, laminated, maple, softwood, nut veneer, cane; Thonet Frankenberg

The Boppard seating furniture was already offered in a three-piece set: chair, armchair, and sofa. While furnishing the Palais Liechtenstein and the Palais Schwarzenberg there was no need for armchairs or sofas, only light running chairs were required. It wasn't until the 1851 World Fair in London that Michael Thonet once again presented a complete set. The set principle was also applied to the earliest standard models: On the poster from 1859, the models No. 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 are already offered in complete threepart sets; in the first sales catalog from 1870 there are already sets

for a total of fourteen model numbers. The connecting of the seating furniture types into sets was accomplished by using the same or similar backrest motifs: In the case of the chair and armchair, this meant a bentwood design made either smaller or larger in scale; while the sofas were supplemented by two or three motifs–depending on whether it was for two or three people.[1] The two-seaters had a width of 111 centimeters, the three-seaters of 139 centimeters. As a rule, however, these were caned and not upholstered, as in the set of Model No. 4 presented here. This upholstered model must have been produced around 1860, as some of the components were not yet completely solid bent, but were composed of individual solid bent components that were joined together after drying.[2]

1 In this respect, the Thonet sofas correspond to the English settees developed in the 17th century, in which the relationship of the chair to the armchair was also determined by the addition of the backrest motifs.

2 It was intended from the beginning for the seats of this special set to have upholstery: Instead of having holes for caning a circumferential bar of 15 mm height was placed inside at the top side of each frame; in the resulting angle, the decorative cord could be attached, which allowed for a softer transition to the upholstery and concealed the nails.

Garnitur Nr. 4 (Sessel, Fauteuil und Kanapee) Complete Set No. 4 (Chair, Armchair, and Sofa)
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1850; Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, um ca. 1860; Buche, massiv gebogen und verleimt, gepolstert Beech, solid bent and laminated, upholstered; MAK H 2972, H 2973 und and H 2978/1987–1988

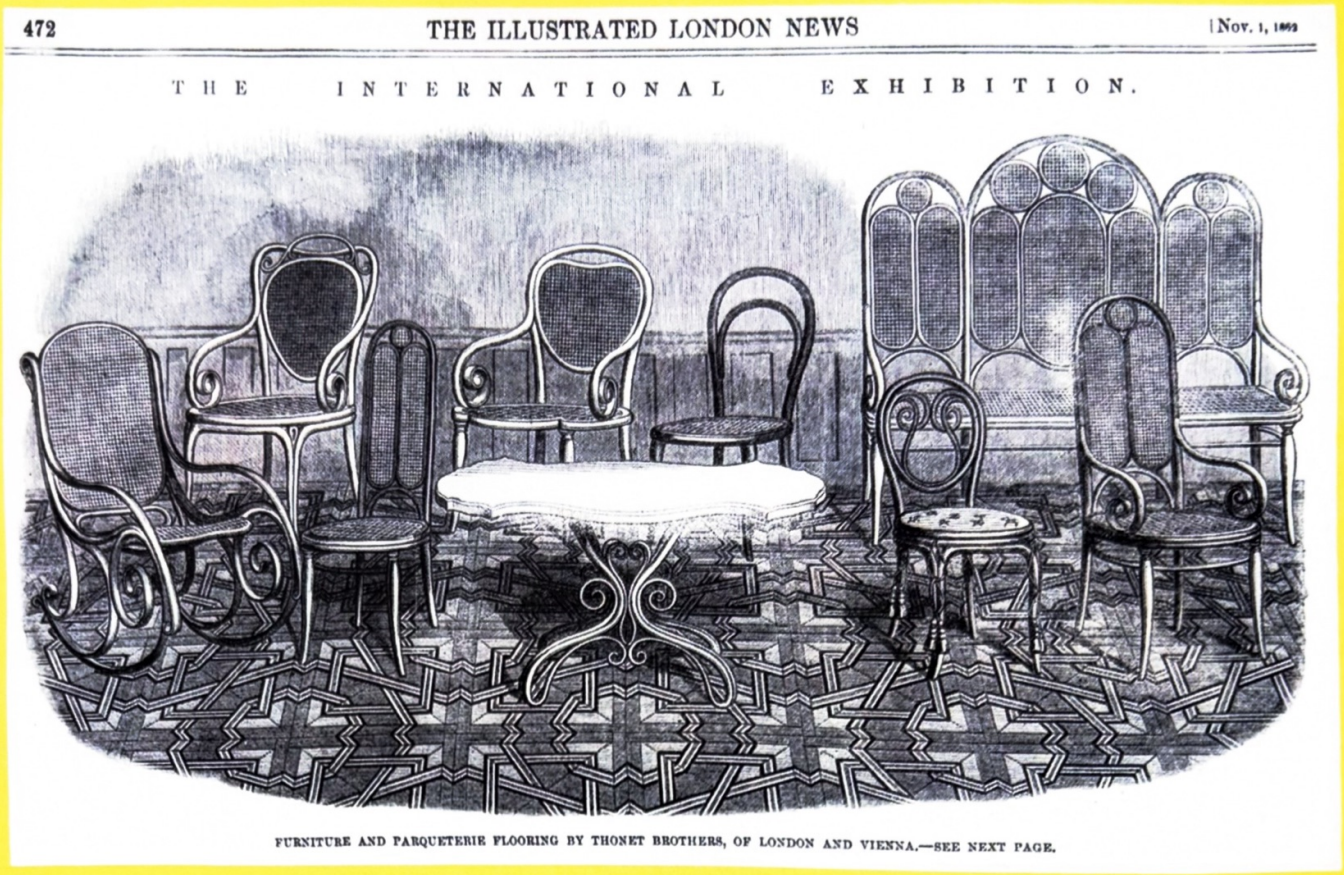
Schaukelfauteuil Nr. 1 *Rocking Chair No. 1*
Entwurf *Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1860*
Ausführung *Execution: unbekannt unknown, um ca. 1880/90; Buche, massiv gebogen,*
Leder, gepolstert *Beech, solid bent, leather, upholstered; MAK H 2199/1969; Schenkung*
Bundeskammer der *gewerblichen Wirtschaft Donation Federal Chamber of Commerce*

Rocking Chairs

Gebrüder Thonet's first rocking chair was produced in Koryčany starting in 1860 and was designed for production in solid bent wood right from the start. Further variations of the rocking chair model No. 1 were developed over the following years, all based on the same design principle: The seat, backrest, and connecting pieces are mounted between two identical side frames. Over time other types of rocking chairs, including chairs on runners and rockers on a solid base, where the rocking function was still preserved by two laterally mounted steel springs, were added to the classic models.[1] An extremely unusual bentwood rocking chair was created in 2011 during a show bending event in the MAK: The designers of the breaded Escalope group used a discarded and slightly damaged plastic stacking chair, which they turned into a functioning rocking chair with self-bent beech wood rails for their "Erlkönig" model. This repair work resulted in the creation of a functional reliquary, as is were, for what is currently the most widespread–and usually considered as ordinary and unattractive–seating furniture in the world: the monobloc.[2]

1 Cf. Chiara Carafa Renzi / Giovanni Renzi / Wolfgang Thillmann, *Thonet rocking chairs*, Milan 2006.
2 Cf. Sebastian Hackenschmidt: "Aktionistische Fabrikationswege der Möbelproduktion," in: Katarina Schildgen (ed.), *breadedEscalope*, Vienna 2014, 38–42.

Schaukelstuhl Rocking Chair „*Erlkönig*"
Entwurf Design: breadedEscalope, *Wien Vienna*, 2011
Ausführung Execution: breadedEscalope, *Wien Vienna*, 2011;
Buche, gebogen Beech, bent; Kunststoff plastic; Metall metal;
MAK H 3607/2012


472 THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS [Nov. 1, 1862

THE INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION.

FURNITURE AND PARQUETERIE FLOORING BY THONET BROTHERS, OF LONDON AND VIENNA.—SEE NEXT PAGE.

Möbel und Parkettboden der Gebrüder Thonet auf der Weltausstellung 1862 in London (aus: *The Illustrated London News*, 1. November 1862) Furniture and parquet floors from Gebrüder Thonet at the 1862 International Exhibition in London (in: *The Illustrated London News*, 1 November 1862)

Starting already as early as 1860, Franz Thonet visited London several times to explore the possibility of setting up his own Thonet sales branch there.[1] The long-planned branch at 16 Ludgate Hill, however, wasn't opened until Easter Monday, 12 April 1862–therefore directly in connection with the opening of the World Fair in South Kensington on 1 May 1862, where in addition to already known models new Thonet products were also presented: Chair No. 14, manufactured starting from 1859, Rocker No. 1 from 1860, and the complete model series No. 16, which was already equipped with the leg ring, which was available starting in the fall of 1861. In addition to this "cheap consumer furniture,"[2] parquet flooring was also shown for the last time on an international stage. On a lithograph in *The Illustrated London News*, Thonet's furniture stands on one of these straight patterned parquet floors: "If we do not have time to make these patterns ourselves, then Leistler will make the same ones for us, I have talked to him."[3] However, Franz Thonet expected that the furnishing of the exhibition's restaurants would have a much larger advertising effect than the exhibits themselves: "They would like to borrow 1000 chairs, but they want to pay only 18 pence for the No. 8 and the No. 14, and I do not want to get less than 2 shillings. We will furnish a hall where 162 chairs are needed and where 5 shilling meals are served with No. 8 chairs, even if we get only 18 pence. This is worth more than the rest of the exhibition and the sales branch together. Everyone sees the chairs and will think that they are strong, and this will greatly enhance our future here and in Paris."[4]

1 Already before the opening of their own sales branch, bentwood furniture from Thonet was sold in London by Ingelbach and Wolffgang (6 Lilypot Lane, Gresham Street).
2 Hermann Heller, *Von der kleinen Tischlerwerkstätte zum Weltindustriehaus*, Brno 1926, 37.
3 Letter from Franz Thonet in London to his brother Joseph in Vienna dated 1 July 1862; copy from Archiv Thillmann.
4 Same author, letter from 18 April 1862; copy from Archiv Thillmann.

In order to offer his customers a complete set of seating furniture, Michael Thonet needed armrests for the armchairs and sofas. The armrests of the classic bentwood armchairs with trapezoidal seat rings started off with the tapering volutes, which were already known from the Boppard furniture.[1] While the armrests of the early armchairs were made with the laminated squared rods–like the ones shown at the World Fair in London–they were cumbersomely joined to the rear stiles using a scarf joint. A different solution had to be found for serial production. Initially, a metal mount was used, in which a rectangular punched perforated plate was inserted into a corresponding recess in the rear stiles and then screwed to it. To create this joint, the top end of the armrest was shaped to match the curve of the stiles. With an inserted bolt it could be fixed by a quarter turn into a perforated metal plate. The part resting on the seat ring was then fastened to the underside using two "invisible" screws.[2] It was not until the mid-1870s that a less elaborate solution was found, in which the armrests were screwed on the stiles. In contrast to the classic armchairs with the trapezoidal seats, the models with a circular seat frame, available as of the early 1870s, were given simplified armrests that ended on the seat frame. From 1877 onward so-called small armchairs were added to the product range. These also had the simple armrests which were not attached to the top of the seat frame, but laterally.

1 The Boppard seating furniture had already been offered as a complete set. The only known sofa from this period no longer has armrests, but mounting points show that they had originally been there.

2 A rare variation can be found in armchair No. 8 manufactured in around 1860 and in a children's armchair, by which the rear part of the armrest was not guided upwards, but rather down to the stiles.

Fauteuil Nr. 8 Armchair No. 8
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1855
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, um ca. 1860; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 2983/1988

Fauteuil Nr. 2 Armchair No. 2
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1850
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, um ca. 1860; Buche, massiv gebogen und verleimt, Geflecht Beech, solid bent and laminated, cane; MAK H 2984/1988

Fauteuil Nr. 15 Armchair No. 15
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, nach after 1875
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, Radomsk, um ca. 1900; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 2193/1969; Schenkung Bundeskammer der gewerblichen Wirtschaft Donation Federal Chamber of Commerce

The natural-colored armchair shown here was manufactured by one of Gebrüder Thonet's Viennese competitors. The most interesting components are the two armrests and front legs, each made from one single laminated component. This type of construction can otherwise be found only in Thonet's children's armchair which was available as of the mid-1860s–however then bent only in solid wood.[1] The question arises: Did the competitors adopt Thonet's construction for children's armchairs for their large armchairs or, conversely, did Gebrüder Thonet adapt one of their competitor's ideas for their children's armchairs? The advantage of this construction is obvious: The production is more economical, since the armrest and front leg are formed by a single component, which can be fastened to the seat frame with only one screw. Using this construction, you could even do without the leg ring in the children's armchairs due to the low seat height; only the higher children's armchairs and children's highchairs, those with a seat height between 50 and 60 centimeters, needed a stabilizing ring, which could then also be used to attach a footrest. In the case of classic adult armchairs, however, for reasons of stability, Thonet considered this method of construction to be out of the question.

1 This concerns the classic children's armchair, where the crest rail, the stiles, and the rear legs are one component. In contrast, Children's Armchair No. 2, available as of 1888, and No. 221, available as of 1898–derived from the model numbers 56 and 221 for adults–have front legs and armrests made of separate components.

Hoher Kinderfauteuil Children's High Armchair
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1870
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1875; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 2196/1969; Schenkung Bundeskammer der gewerblichen Wirtschaft Donation Federal Chamber of Commerce

Stockerl Nr. 4713 Stool No. 4713
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1865
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1900, Bistritz Bystřice;
Buche, massiv gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid bent, plywood;
MAK H 2690/1983

Stockerl Nr. 4746 für die Österreichische Postsparkasse
Stool No. 4746 for the Austrian Postal Savings Bank
Entwurf Design: Otto Wagner, Wien Vienna, 1902; Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, 1902; Buche, massiv gebogen, Sperrholz, Aluminium Beech, solid bent, plywood, aluminum; MAK LHG 1489/1982; Dauerleihnahme der Österreichischen Postsparkasse AG
Long-term loan from the Austrian Postal Savings Bank Corp.

Stools were part of a Gebrüder Thonet's product range already in the 1860s. After the "invention" of the circularly bent seat frame a variety of these simple and functional utilitarian pieces of furniture were produced in different designs, heights, and seat diameters. In the course of the furnishing of the Postal Savings Bank shortly after the turn of the century, Otto Wagner radically modernized this typical piece of furniture: Four identical, rectangular bentwood frames were bolted to a base frame, a plywood board, which served as a seat, was inserted in a fifth frame.[1] In the supplement to the *Zentral-Anzeiger* No. 24 from 30 June 1908, this piece of furniture, which was groundbreaking for Viennese Modernism both in terms of construction and form, was presented for general sale for the first time as stool No. 46.[2] Stool B 313–often falsely at-

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2 Cf. Giov

B 313, *Thonet-Mundus Zentralanzeiger* No. 99, July 1929, Special issue: Price matters, 3

Hocker Stool B 313
Entwurf Design: Thonet Mundus, um ca. 1929
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Mundus, um ca. 1929; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Bast, Metall Beech, solid and bent, bast, metal; MAK H 3641/2013

Hocker Nr. 270 Stool No. 270
Entwurf Design: Verner Panton, Dänemark/Deutschland Denmark/Germany, 1965/66; Ausführung Execution: A. Sommer für for Thonet Frankenberg, Deutschland Germany, 1966–71; Buche, schichtverleimt, Sperrholz, Aluminium Beech, laminated, plywood, aluminum; Privatsammlung Private Collection

FAUTEUIL A 60 F UND STOCKERL B 313.

Diese beiden Modelle werden normal mit je 4 Gummipuffern an den Bodenteilen der Seitenrahmen ausgeführt, wofür Kč 2.-- netto per Möbelstück berechnet werden.

Die Preise dieser beiden Modelle haben eine Erhöhung erfahren; sie betragen demnach für A 60 F poliert...alt-Brutto 17.50 (14.25)
" B 313 " ... " " 9.25 (8.25)
Auf den Neuheitenkarten vormerken!

B 313

A 60 F

Fauteuil A 60 F und das Hocker B 313, *Thonet-Mundus Zentralanzeiger* Nr. 99, Juli 1929, Specialausgabe: Preisangelegenheiten, 3 Armchair A 60 F and Stool B 313, *Thonet-Mundus Zentralanzeiger* No. 99, July 1929, Special issue: Price matters, 3

Modernization Processes

Fauteuil Nr. 725 B/F Armchair No. 725 B/F
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: J. & J. Kohn, um ca. 1905; Buche, massiv gebogen, Leder, gepolstert Beech, solid bent, leather, upholstered;
MAK H 3092/1990

The comparison of these two armchairs exemplifies how a piece of bentwood furniture from the 1860s became a "modern" piece of furniture. The so-called "Ladies' Armchair" from Gebrüder Thonet was already shown on the poster from 1866, and was structurally different from all the seating furniture to date.[1] The crest rail and the armrests are made of one single component. The armrests have no volutes as in the classic armchairs, but rather run diagonally until under the seat. The rear legs merge into the inner crest rail, in which an additional caned medallion is inserted.[2] The Kohn armchair No. 725/B/F,[3] which was created shortly after the turn of the century—often mistakenly attributed to Josef Hoffmann on account of its "modern" design vocabulary—displays a variation on the construction of the Ladies' Armchair. Due to a newly developed process, almost rectangular bends could be carried out for the first time, making the geometrically effective constructions typical of Viennese Modernism possible—an impression which is further enhanced by the rectangular wooden cross-sections. The stabilizing role of the leg ring is taken over by the four balls attached under the seat. Additionally, the legs are joined into a u-shaped base.

1 It has sometimes been suggested that the term used for this piece of furniture ("Ladies' Armchair") indicates that the beveled armrests were meant avoid the restriction of women's freedom of movement when knitting; however, no concrete proof could be found for this claim.

2 The same construction can be found in the writing desk armchair No. 9, which was highly esteemed by Le Corbusier, whereby here the armrests do not run transversely downwards, but rather are led downward starting at the level of the front legs.

3 An identical armchair was offered under the number 725/g. However, the u-shaped base, which rests on the floor in the model shown, is set approx. 10 centimeters higher here, the legs were given brass shoes. Cf. Kohn's catalog from 1906, pp. 22 and 33 in: Giovanni e Chiara Renzi, *Curve e Biondi Riccioli Viennesi*, Milano 2000.

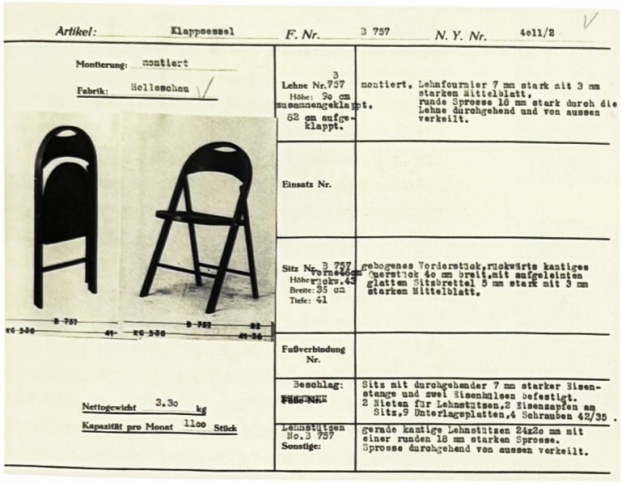
Klappmöbel

Kaminsessel Nr.1 zum Zusammenlegen Fireside Chair No. 1 foldable
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1863
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1880;
Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane;
Sammlung Collection Yvan & Francine Snauwaert

Kaminsessel Nr.1 mit Armlehnen Fireside Chair No. 1 with armrests
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1863
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1880;
Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane;
Sammlung Collection Yvan & Francine Snauwaert

Furniture "for folding" was in Gebrüder Thonet's product range already in 1863, starting in 1866, it was shown on the sales posters: Fireside Chair, Fireside Armchair and Folding Armchair No. 2. Over the following years, more folding or collapsible furniture with varying mechanisms were developed: With the chairs, the legs which crossed in an x-shape were simply folded together below or at the height of the seat; On the other hand, in the case of armchairs, a toggle mechanism had to be opened below the armrests before the chair could be folded. In contrast to the classic folding furniture of the 19th century, the Model B 751[1], which was developed in the 1920s, has a special mechanism based on a metal frame fastened under the seat and on the inside of the rear legs. This chair was then also made of tubular steel, in identical form, and offered as No. B 61 in Thonet's *Steckkartenkatalog* from 1930. All things considered, the possibility to store chairs in a space-saving manner by using folding mechanisms, played a rather subordinate role for the company. Surprisingly, the possibility to store efficiently by stacking played almost no role at all.

1 Different numbers for this folding chair are found on the index cards, the numbers were assigned according to the design or the dimensions of the individual components. Thus, there are various types of back rests (B 757, B 756/1 or 751), seat types (B 757 or 736/1) or braces (B 757 or B 751) whose components could be combined in various different ways. However, there is no recognizable system by which the folding chair received their final catalog number.



Artikel: Klappsessel F. Nr. B 757 N. Y. Nr. 4ell/2

Montierung: montiert

Fabrik: Hellenchen

Lehne Nr. B 757 — Höhe: 9o cm zusammengeklappt, 62 cm aufgeklappt. — montiert. Lehnfournier 7 mm stark mit 3 mm starken Mittelblatt, runde Sprosse 18 mm stark durch die Lehne durchgehend und von aussen verkeilt.

Einsatz Nr.

Sitz Nr. B 757 — Vorderteil Höhe vorn 45, Breite: 35 cm, Tiefe: 41 — gebogenes Vorderteil, rückwärts kantiges Querteil 4o cm breit, mit aufgeleimten glattem Sitzbrettel 3 mm stark mit 3 mm starken Mittelblatt.

Fußverbindung Nr.

Beschlag: Sitz mit durchgehender 7 mm starker Eisenstange und zwei Eisenhalsen befestigt. 2 Nieten für Lehnstützen, 2 Eisennägeln am Sitz, 9 Unterlageplatten, 4 Schrauben 42/35.

Lehnstützen No. B 757 — gerade kantige Lehnstützen 24x2o mm mit einer runden 18 mm starken Sprosse. Sprosse durchgehend von aussen verkeilt.

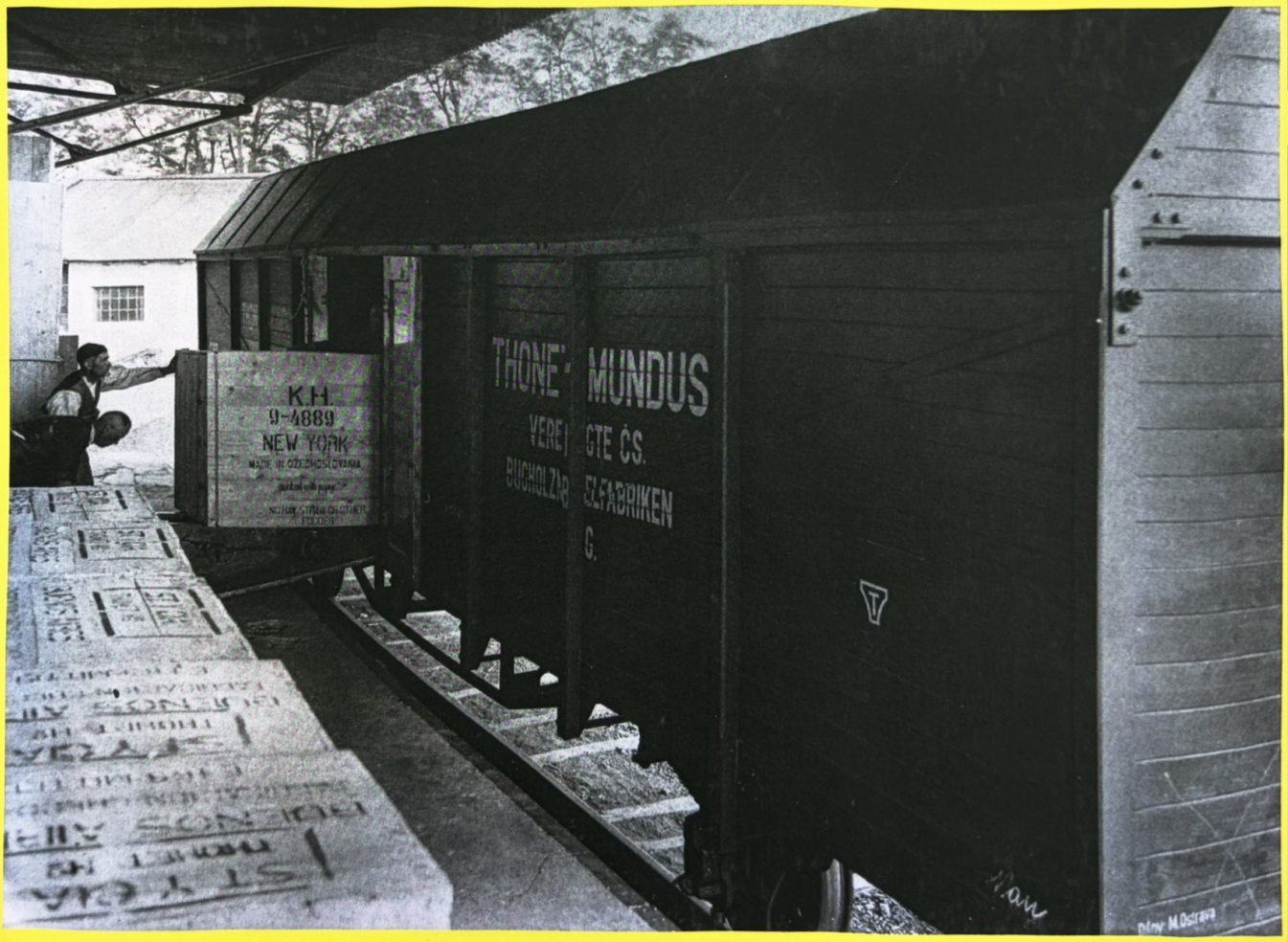
Sonstige:

Nettogewicht 3,3o kg

Kapazität pro Monat 11oo Stück

Karteikarte von Thonet Mundus für Klappsessel Modell B 757, um 1930
Index card for the folding chair model B 757 from Thonet Mundus, ca. 1930

Klappsessel Folding Chair B 751/757
Entwurf Design: Thonet Mundus, um ca. 1930
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Mundus, Holleschau Holešov, um ca. 1930; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz, Metall Beech, solid and bent, plywood, metal; Thonet Frankenberg



Verpacken der demontierten Sessel in Kisten in der Fabrik Bistritz und Transport der Kisten mit der Eisenbahn (Abbildungen aus dem Album Thonet Mundus von 1929) Package of the disassembled chairs into boxes in Bystřice factory and transport of the boxes by train (illustrations from the Thonet Mundus album 1929)

reason behind the location of the Thonet ories was the proximity to the raw material od–combined with the fact that labor es in the countryside were far cheaper in the city. However, the furniture then to be transported cheaply to the centers. this purpose, they were disassembled their individual parts, packed in cases, sent with the most modern means of nsport at that time, the railway. The Thonets refore even tried to influence the train ites. When in 1866 a railway line was to ss Koryčany, the site of the first Thonet tory, Franz Thonet reported to the family 6 March: "The engineer will inspect the ferent lines and then state which ones he nsiders the most suitable."[1] Then on March 1866 he wrote: "Write to me as on as the engineer has arrived, then we'll n him over together."[2] Nearly a year later, on February 1867, finally, the success report: ictory. The train is coming through Kočany"[3] Not least because of the dismantling the furniture and the associated logistical ficiency is Thonet often compared to IKEA day.[4] One major difference, however, is that EA "outsources the final assembly of the rniture to the customers, effectively making em unpaid employees of the company."[5] In ontrast, the Thonet bentwood furniture was ot assembled by the customer after delivery, ut rather by the employees in the branches.

Franz Thonet, Letter from 6 March 1866 from Bystřice pod Hostýnem to brother Michael in Koryčany; copy Archiv Thillmann.
Same author, Letter from 14 March 1866 to Michael; copy Archiv Thillmann.
Same author, Letter from 7 February 1867 to Michael; copy Archiv Thillmann.
Cf. Markus Frenzl, "Die Faszination von Serie und Linie. Zu Thonet als Designmythos der Moderne," in: Exhib. Cat. Munich 2019: *Thonet & Design*, 144–146.
Martina Fineder / Thomas Geisler / Sebastian Hackenschmidt, "Eine kurze Geschichte des Möbelselbstbaus," in: the same (eds.), *Nomadic Furniture 3.0* (MAK Studies 23), Zurich 2017, 46–103: 61.

Transportkiste (Nachbau) zum Verschicken der demontierten Möbel Shipping crate (replica) for sending dismantled furniture; Fichte, Eisennägel, Deutschland 2019 Spruce, iron nails, Germany 2019; Sammlung Collection Werner

egal „Billy", in Originalverpackung
Billy" shelf, in original box
ntwurf Design: Gillis Lundgren,
chweden Sweden, 1979
ertrieb Distribution: IKEA, Schweden Sweden,
019; Holz, weiß lackiert, Metall, Kartonage Wood,
ainted white, metal, cardboard; Privatsammlung
rivate Collection

The 1867 World Fair in Paris

Salonsessel Salon Chair, präsentiert auf der Weltausstellung 1867
presented at the 1867 World Fair in Paris
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1866
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, 1866; Buche, massiv gebogen, gepolstert
Beech, solid bent, upholstered; Firmensammlung Company Collection TON

As early as 1860, Thonet's bentwood furniture was available in Paris–at Ingelbach and Wolffgang (66, rue de Bondy), which also had a sales outlet in London. Although the opening of Thonet's own sales branch was planned for August or September 1861, it was in the course of the Paris World Fair, which started on 1 April 1867, that the branch (92, Boulevard Sebastopol) was finally opened. The Thonets displayed an elaborately designed board on which the already existing branches in Vienna, London, Hamburg, Berlin, Rotterdam, Pest, Linz, and Brno were proudly listed. In addition to the production models, the now well-known and prevalent company on the Champ-de-Mars also presented the so-called demonstration chair made in Bystřice pod Hostýnem. This chair was never intended for sale. It was merely meant to serve as proof of the technologically perfect mastery of wood bending. The presentation was made complete with upholstered chairs and a new rocking chair, model No. 3, which was also available as a double rocker, in which the users sat opposite each other.[1] Luxury models, as had been seen at the Paris World Fair of 1855, and parquet flooring were no longer to be found.

1 Unfortunately, no copy of this model has been preserved–the image is a virtual reconstruction based on a photograph. (Thanks to Manfred Schuh.)

Doppelschaukelfauteuil Nr. 3, Gebrüder Thonet,
um 1865 (fotografische Rekonstruktion)
Double Rocking Armchair No. 3, Gebrüder Thonet,
ca. 1865 (photographic reconstruction)

Schlangenschirmständer
Snake Umbrella Stand
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet,
um ca. 1900
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder
Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, Radomsk,
um ca. 1904: Buche, massiv gebogen,

Zwei Biegespiralen für Ausstellungszwecke Two curved volutes for exhibition purposes
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1880; Buche, massiv gebogen
Beech, solid bent; Firmensammlung Company Collection TON

Sessel Nr. 60 Chair No. 60
Entwurf Design: J. & J. Kohn, um ca. 1900
Ausführung Execution: vermutl. spanischer Hersteller presumably Spanish manufacturer; Buche, massiv gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid bent, plywood;
Sammlung Collection Werner

Sessel Nr. 12 Chair No. 12
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution:
Hijo de Ventura Feliu, Valencia, um ca. 1890; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane;
MAK H 2916/1987

Sessel Nr. 12 Chair No. 12
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution:
Hijo de Ventura Feliu, Valencia, um ca. 1890; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane;
MAK H 3012-1/1988

Fauteuil Nr. 38 Armchair No. 38
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: D. G. Fischel Söhne, Niemes Mimoň, um ca. 1890; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 2928/1987

Sessel Nr. 41 Chair No. 41
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: D. G. Fischel Söhne, Niemes Mimoň, um ca. 1890; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 2178/1969; Schenkung Bundeskammer der gewerblichen Wirtschaft Donation Federal Chamber of Commerce

After Gebrüder Thonet's privilege was revoked in 1869, competing companies soon also began to manufacture furniture using solid wood bending technology. Initially, almost identical copies of the Thonet models were made, but eventually furniture with independently developed motifs on the backrests could also be found. Both D. G. Fischel Sons and J. & J. Kohn each created a series of furniture whose design was based not as much on functional aspects as on the pleasure of ornamental design and at the same time demonstrated the complete mastery of the bending process.[1] In addition, there were a number of producers who also followed new directions in terms of construction: For example, the Belgian company Cambier in Ath created a special type of leg connection for which they procured a patent to protect.[2] On the other hand, the Spanish manufacturer Ventura Feliu in Valencia tried to make their mark with two different types of leg bracing. Another, probably also Spanish manufacturer added the leg connection, not as an independent component, but rather by developing it out of the rear legs: These were cut open and the inner part then bent so that it could be screwed to the diagonally opposite front leg.

1 It may be an attempt to distinguish it from the Thonet model, comparable to the conscious "use of turned parts to highlight a unique product identity." CF. Jaromira Simoniková, Introduction, in: Ketterer Kunst Verlag, *D. G. Fischel Söhne, Der Katalog von 1915*, Munich 1992, VI–XXXV.

2 German Reichs patent 68602, Berlin, 21 June 1892. (Friendly hint from Luc Snoeckx.)

Das Modell Nr. 4

Sessel Nr. 4 Chair No. 4
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, 1849
D. G. Fischel Söhne, Niemes Mimoň, um ca. 1890; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 2176/1969; Schenkung Bundeskammer der gewerblichen Wirtschaft Donation Federal Chamber of Commerce

Schaukelstuhl Rocking Chair
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: unbekannt unknown, USA, 2. H. 19. Jh. 2nd half of the 19th century; Buche, massiv gebogen und geschnitzt, Geflecht Beech, solid bent and carved, cane; MAK H 2966/1988; Schenkung Donation Alexander von Vegesack

Sessel Chair
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: Henry I. Seymour, New York, 2. H. 19. Jh. 2nd half of the 19th century; Buche, Eiche, massiv und gebogen, Geflecht Beech, oak, solid and bent, cane; MAK H 2982/ 1987; Schenkung Donation Alexander von Vegesack

Schaukelstuhl Rocking Chair
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: Henry I. Seymour, New York, um ca. 1870; Nussbaum, Esche, Eiche, massiv und gebogen, Geflecht Walnut, ash, oak, solid and bent, cane; MAK H 2964/1987

Chair Model No. 4 was first presented in 1850 at the exhibition of the Lower Austrian Trade Association. The first delivery dates from the summer of 1851: A Mr. Bartl ordered four dozen chairs and one dozen armchairs for the "Zur Königin von England" Hotel in Pest (Budapest). In the fall of the same year, Daum's café was also furnished with Model No. 4 chairs.[1] The aesthetically pleasing back motif of this model was also very popular with European as well as non-European bentwood manufacturers at that time–especially in the USA: In addition to the "bold" rocking chair construction of an unknown manufacturer, in which the backrest motif is not connected to the rails in the lower area, this motif is also found in the furniture of Henry I. Seymour, who also used the same rear support construction as Gebrüder Thonet.[2] However, he chose a simpler seat and a different type of leg connection, which was obviously in keeping with American taste: "Rather than striving to confuse consumers with Thonet imitations, as did J. & J. Kohn and Fischel in Europe, manufacturers in the United States seem to have had a particularly American desire to domesticate these foreign designs."[3]

1 This chronology differs from the presentation in Thonet's own company history, according to which the Viennese Café Daum was the first establishment to be furnished with chair No. 4. Cf. Ulrich Löber, "Jakob Henrich, Schreinermeister aus Boppard," therein: Michael Thonet Jr's letter from 15 August 1851, in: Exhib.-Cat. *Thonet, Biegen oder Brechen*, Koblenz 1996, 38–42.
2 Cf. Barry R. Harwood, "Two Early Thonet Imitators in the United States," in: *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Fall 1994), The University of Chicago Press, 92–113.
3 Ibid., 105.

Sessel Nr. 3 Chair No. 3
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1850
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, um ca. 1900;
Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 2175-2/1969;
Schenkung Bundeskammer der gewerblichen Wirtschaft Donation Federal
Chamber of Commerce

Gartensessel (nach Thonet-Sessel Nr. 3) Garden Chair (after Thonet Chair No. 3)
Ausführung Execution: unbekannt unknown, Österreich Austria, um ca. 1870
Eisenrohr, gebogen, lackiert; Geflecht Iron pipe, bent, painted; cane;
MAK SOB 162/1956

Bentwood Furniture vs. Iron Furniture

The question as to whether the design of the bentwood chairs was oriented towards early chairs made of iron in terms of form and motifs, or if these–conversely–in fact copied the shapes of bentwood furniture, has not yet been clarified. It is only in the case of the rocking chairs that one can say with certainty that it wasn't until the invention of the solid wood bending process in 1860 that this furniture type could be executed in bentwood, while corresponding designs made of iron are to be dated earlier.[1] Bent iron chairs–first flat iron, later iron bars and pipes–were also made in the first half of the 19th century, before the first bentwood furniture; However, the characteristic backrest motifs of the bentwood chairs can be found increasingly in chairs made of round iron, starting from the 1860s.[2] Presumably, this can be taken as an indication that the manufacturers of iron chairs had taken over the design repertoire of the successful bentwood furniture. While mass-produced bentwood furniture could meet the demand for cheap seating for semi-public interiors–such as pubs and cafés–the ironworks, also mass-produced in industrial quantities, "covered the enormous needs of large cities for their public spaces and gardens in a simple and inexpensive way."[3] And as Georg Himmelheber wrote in his book on iron furniture, "the infinitely varied possibilities of iron" could, as with the bentwood furniture, "just as easily lead to lapses in taste, as to top performances in the purely functional thinking of the designers."[4]

1 Cf. Chiara Carafa Renzi / Giovanni Renzi / Wolfgang Thillmann, *sedie a dondolo thonet / Thonet rocking chairs*, Milan 2006.
2 Cf. Georg Himmelheber, *Möbel aus Eisen*, Munich 1996.
3 Ibid., 55.
4 Ibid., 52.

Gartensessel (nach Thonet-Sessel Nr. 14) Garden Chair (after Thonet Chair No. 14)
Ausführung Execution: unbekannt unknown, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1870;
Eisenrohr, gebogen; Eisenblech, gelocht Bent iron pipe, perforated iron sheet;
MAK/ H 2617/1981; Schenkung Donation Inge Zerunian

Fauteuil Nr.14 Armchair No. 14
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1870
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, Radomsk, um ca. 1890;
Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 2195/1969;
Schenkung Bundeskammer der gewerblichen Wirtschaft Donation Federal Chamber of Commerce

The 1873 World Fair in Vienna

At the World Fair in Vienna in 1873, the Thonet brothers–who had already participated in the first four world exhibitions in London and Paris–for the first time presented their products in both the Austrian and Hungarian sections of Group 8 "Timber Industry."[1] A complete model No. 15 set, manufactured in a simplyfied form as of 1875,[2] which was supplemented by salon table No. 8 was on display. Extremely elaborate spiral notches had been cut into the rods of these pieces of furniture–possibly in response to the negative verdict of the well-known art historian Jakob von Falke, who wrote the following about Thonet's furniture: "Likewise, our bent chairs, which although they do combine some solidity with ease and under certain conditions, e.g. in coffee houses, can be used to great advantage, but cannot be used for an artistically furnished apartment, because they give us only transparent woven cane, skinny, thin rods, where the eye requires a meaningful object distinguished by form and color."[3] In the Hungarian section, a board with more than 30 prize medals pointed out the high quality of Thonet's products. The presentation of chair No. 4 in an additional exhibition on the subject of "History of Trade and Inventions" shows that one was already fully aware of its historical significance. As the Thonet biographer Hermann Heller wrote about it: "Such a chair from Café Daum was shown to illustrate the manufacturing methods of those times in the special department for the history of inventions at the Vienna World Fair in 1873 and is now located in the Technological Museum of Trade in Vienna."[4]

1 A comprehensive presentation of the World Fair can be found in: Exhib. Cat. Vienna 2014: *Experiment Metropole – 1873: Wien und die Weltausstellung.*
2 However, with smooth rods and simple armrests.
3 Jakob von Falke, *Die Kunst im Hause*, Vienna 1873, 287.
4 Hermann Heller, *Von der kleinen Tischlerwerkstätte zum Welt-industriehaus*, Brno 1926, 20.

Garnitur (Sessel, Fauteuil und Kanapee) Complete Set (Chair, Armchair, and Sofa),
präsentiert auf Weltausstellung 1873 in Wien presented at the 1873 World Fair in Vienna
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1872
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1872; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; Firmensammlung Company Collection TON

As the architectural historian Sigfried Giedion stated in his book *Mechanization Takes Command*, published in 1948, there was a rapid mechanization of furniture production in the course of the so-called patent furniture movement of the 19th century: Particularly in the US, a huge variety of sophisticated mechanisms was registered for patent approval, which not only had a positive impact on the seating furniture sector in the form of improvements in seating comfort through adjustable seats and backrests, but also precipitated a high level of specialization.[1] In the second half of the 19th century, chairs based on the American model, with mechanisms allowing for more diversified–today one would say: active-dynamic–working postures, were increasingly produced also in Europe. Already in the mid-1860s, the Thonet company offered a revolving stool, which was further developed to the model on the poster from 1873 and then on to the Revolving Armchair No. 1 shown here. In contrast to this early rotating furniture, whose lower section, with the four bentwood legs arranged around a central part, and whose caned seat and backrest were dedicated to the characteristic Thonet aesthetics, later models oriented themselves more heavily on American models also in terms of form. As of 1908, for example, the company added the Revolving Armchair No. 5541, which was based on tiltable American barber chairs, to its product palette,[2] and then in the early 1920s, also the "revolving stool for typists"[3] model No. 5110, which already had the look of the typical office chairs of the 20th century. The almost motor-like mechanism under the seat of this model was hardly possible to overlook and allowed for the adjustment of not only the seat height between 38 and 52 centimeters, but also the fixation and the angle of inclination of the seat and the suspension and position of the backrest.

1 Cf. Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command–A Contribution to Anonymous History*, New York, 1948.
2 The company introduced a new numbering system for their furniture in the 1904 catalog. Supplementary numbers were placed in front of the already existing product numbers, making it possible to assign the products to the respective furniture type. In this way the Rotary Armchair No. 41 became the No. 5541.
3 *Zentral-Anzeiger* No. 75 from 15 December 1922, no page number.

The Thonet chair No. 25–designed in 1875–was first illustrated in the earliest known sales catalog from 1879. In addition to the No. 26, in which the three hairpin-shaped backrest inserts merely touch and do not cross, the No. 25 was certainly one of Gebrüder Thonet's most attractive models from that period. The sales catalogs of various manufacturers offer identical copies of the Thonet model under the same name or a different model number.1 The variant we contrast here with the Thonet model comes from the company Farsky & Jaworek from Těšín and was produced between 1875 and 1879.2 In accordance with the preference of Historicism for ornate forms, the firm apparently wanted to improve on or outdo the Thonet model and let the middle hairpin terminate in two volutes.

1 At Fischel it received, as with Thonet, the model number 25 (Fischel Catalog from 1890; Archiv Wolfgang Thillmann), at Ungvár [*Ungvárer Möbelfabriks-Aktien-Gesellschaft*] number 37; cf. Graham Dry, *Reprint of the 1900 Ungvár catalog*, Munich 1983, 10.
2 Thanks to Yvan Snauwaert for this information.

Sessel (nach Thonet-Sessel Nr. 25) Chair (after Thonet Chair No. 25)
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1875
Ausführung Execution: Farsky & Jaworek, Teschen Český Těšín, 1875–79; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 2186/1969; Schenkung Bundeskammer der gewerblichen Wirtschaft Donation Federal Chamber of Commerce

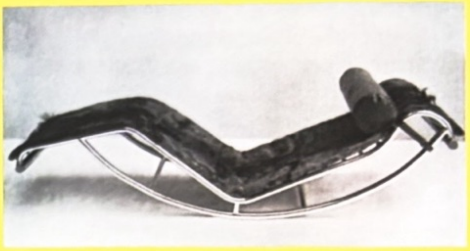
Die Weltausstellung 1876 in Philadelphia

The 1876 World Fair in Philadelphia

In keeping with the taste of the times, the furniture presented at the 1876 World Fair in Philadelphia was more elaborate than ever before: An example of this is the lavishly decorated rocking chair No. 1, in which the caning is replaced by voluminous upholstery and the formerly clear line of bentwood rods was interrupted by turned, carved, and gilded elements applied to it. The ornamental decoration culminated in two swans with splayed wings, by which the bentwood rods rising from the runners were completely concealed, as well as in a carved top piece, which crowned the crest rail.[1] However, yet another, by today's standards far more elegant and seminal specimen of rocking furniture was shown in Philadelphia, the rocking sofa which had recently been developed in Bystřice pod Hostýnem: It seems as though Le Corbusier, Charlotte Perriand and Pierre Jeanneret took this design as model for their tubular steel chaise longue B 306, which was designed in 1928 and, starting in 1930, was also produced by Thonet.[2] In addition, the so-called "chaise longue a réglage continu" of the French architects also received a fixed base on which adjustable section rests loosely and whose inclination angle can thus be variably adjusted. The reference to the bentwood model is indeed all the more obvious when used without the fixed base.

1 The exhibit was decorated and upholstered by the Viennese decorating studio Atelier Anton Fix. The furnishing and decorating company based at Wienstraße 33 (now Rechte Wienzeile) merged with August Portois in 1881 and from 1884 it traded as a furniture manufacturer under the name of "Portois & Fix."

2 For the history of the design see George Marcus, *Le Corbusier, im Innern der Wohnmaschine*, Munich 2000, in particular, 94–145.



Die Chaiselongue von Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret und Charlotte Perriand als Schaukelmöbel
The Chaise Longue by Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, and Charlotte Perriand as a Rocking Sofa

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Schaukelsofa Rocking Sofa
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet/August Thonet, um ca. 1875
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, Radomsk, um ca. 1890;
Buche, massiv und gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid and bent, cane; MAK H 2935/1987

Chaiselongue Chaise Longue B 306, „Chaise longue à reglage continu"
Entwurf Design: Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand, Paris, 1928
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Frères, Paris, um ca. 1935; Stahl, Textil, Gummi
Steel, textile, rubber; Sammlung Collection Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein

Schlafsofa Nr. 2 Reclining Couch No. 2
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1875
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1890; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid and bent, cane;
MAK H 2963/1988

Reclining Couches

In the 1860s, Gebrüder Thonet mainly offered furniture for semi-public spaces, such as cafés, restaurants, and later also offices and waiting rooms. In the 1870s, the product range was extended to the field of home furnishings, including the so-called reclining furniture: There was a rocking sofa, which was on runners and was thus movable, and also pieces of furniture on a fixed base. Of the latter, there were four different versions, whereby reclining couch No. 2 used the same reclining surface and the same mechanism for adjusting the backrest as the rocking sofa presented in Philadelphia in 1876.[1] In the 1930s, it was the fixed couches in particular which became popular pieces of furniture in the modern interiors. Marcel Breuer was one of the first in 1933 to pick up on this type of furniture for the competition *Concours international du meilleur siège en aluminium* and designed a resilient aluminum chaise longue.[2] When Breuer had moved to England, Jack Pritchard, the founder of Isokon, commissioned him to design a wooden reclining chair. After a series of failed attempts, Breuer managed to get his chaise longue B.C.1–the so-called "Long Chair" with laminated side frames and a reclining surface made of plywood–produced by Isokon in 1936.[3] Breuer also used the same side frames for the so-called "Short Chair"; only the plywood sheet was shortened in the front area, so that the feet of the user could reach the floor.[4]

1 Here, however, without armrests.
2 Cf. Christopher Wilk, *Marcel Breuer. Furniture and Interiors*, New York 1981, 108–125.
3 Cf. Thillmann, *Schichten*, Munich 2018, 137–175.
4 In addition to "Long Chair," the term "Reclining Chair" is used in the contemporary descriptions. The "Short Chair" is also referred to as an "Easy Chair."

Long Chair B.C.1
Entwurf Design: Marcel Breuer, London, 1935/36
Ausführung Execution: Isokon Furniture Company, London, 1936–39;
Birke schichtverleimt (Gestell), Birken-Sperrholz der Firma Luterma
Laminated birch (frame), birch plywood from the company Luterma;
Löffler Collection

Sitzflächen und Rückenlehnen aus Sperrholz

Sessel Chair
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: unbekannt unknown, um ca. 1880; Buche, Sperrholz, Messingnägel Beech, plywood, brass nails; Privatsammlung Private Collection

Sessel Nr. 110 Chair No. 110
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1891; Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Wsetin Vsetín, Ugrósz, Radomsk, Frankenberg, um ca. 1900; Buche, Sperrholz Beech, plywood; MAK H 2217/1970; Schenkung des Bundesministeriums für Unterricht und Kunst Donation from the Federal Ministry of Education and Art

Sessel Nr.18 Chair No. 18
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1875
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, Bistritz Bystřice, Wsetin Vsetín, Ugrósz, Radomsk, Frankenberg, 1882–1900; Buche, massiv gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid bent, plywood; Sammlung Collection Werner

Klappsessel Folding Chair aus from Ludwigslust
Entwurf Design: unbekannt unknown, um ca. 1890
Ausführung Execution: unbekannt unknown, Sperrholzteile von Luterma Plywood parts from Luterma, Tallin, um ca. 1890; Sperrholz, Metall Plywood, metal; MAK H 3642/2013

As the correspondent of the Austrian Commission, Franz Thonet had visited the World Fair in Philadelphia in 1876, and it was there at the latest that he got to know Gardner's plywood furniture. The Thonet company reacted immediately and built the first plywood factory in Europe.[1] Along with J. & J. Kohn, which also produced plywood in Holešov as of 1890, Thonet was to remain the only manufacturer of bentwood furniture in the 19th century to produce this material itself.[2] Initially, the goal was to replace the fragile caning with the more durable plywood. Thus, chair No. 18, first presented in 1876, was offered with a plywood seat at the latest in 1883. In the years that followed, Gebrüder Thonet increasingly used this material, mainly for seating furniture. From 1888, the panels could also be decorated with an embossed pattern[3]—as a result, a "style" could be imprinted on the furniture: In Historicism mainly Gothic and Renaissance motifs, around 1900 more often lilies and water lilies from the design vocabulary of Art Nouveau. At the beginning of the 20th century, an abstract-geometric repertoire of patterns was frequently found: The plywood seats were made in "wave, triangle, and ray design"[4]—and even with the pattern of "Wiener Geflecht" [Viennese caning]. Inscriptions, monograms, and even coats of arms could be stamped on request, if the order was large enough. In any case, it was believed that you couldn't expect the customers to accept untreated plywood.

1 "The production of initially laminated, perforated, veneered wood seats which began in the Gr. Ugrosz factory in 1877 was of greatest importance […]." Wilhelm Franz Exner, *Das Biegen des Holzes*, Leipzig ⁴1922, 43.
2 The largest producer of plywood seats in the 19th century was Luterma, located in Tallinn. Cf. Jüri Kermik, Exhib. Cat. Tallinn, 2004: *The Luther factory, plywood and furniture, 1877–1940*. "In 1887 […] 608 000 plywood seats were made, which amounted to 95% of the firm's total output." Ibid., 23.
3 Cf. Exner ⁴1922, 43.
4 Cf. *ZA* No. 6 from 15 February 1905, 1 (Supplement).

Armlehnsessel Armchair
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: unbekannt unknown, Südchina Southern China, Meiji-Epoche Meiji Era (1868–1912); Bambus; Rohrgeflecht Bamboo; caning; MAK OR 2219/1907

>
Kanapee und Fußschemel Nr.150 Sofa and Footstool No. 150
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1890
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, Radomsk, um ca. 1900; Buche, massiv und gebogen, gepolstert Beech, solid and bent, upholstered; Privatsammlung Private Collection

Sessel Chair
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: unbekannt unknown, Europa Europe, 1. H. 19. Jh. 1st half 19th century; Buche, gepolstert Beech, upholstered; MAK H 2269-1/1974

Bamboo Furniture

In the field of art as well as arts and crafts, the imitation of materials has been an established cultural practice for centuries: In order to imitate solid wood, various plastic materials such as papier mâché, gypsum or cast iron were used repeatedly. Cheap native woods were also often covered with rare and exotic veneers or visually enhanced by chemical stains. In the context of exotic movements, bamboo was sometimes imitated: This exotic material was characteristic, especially for the chinoiserie–European works of art, which were based on Chinese and Indo-Chinese models–which was popular in the 18th century. While real bamboo was used for trays, writing tools, and small containers, it was usually imitated for tea sets and furniture. When exoticism, brought on by the world fairs in the middle of the 19th century, came back into fashion, the bamboo furniture also had a small renaissance, which the Thonet company became a part of in the 1890s, starting out with a furniture series made from "imitations of light and brown bamboo"[1]: This series included a wide range of all types of home furnishings, including complete sets which were made from beech rods, turned in such a way that they looked like real bamboo with its characteristic annular thickenings and were bolted together like regular bentwood furniture.[2] However, due to an increasingly negative view of the imitation of materials and the historical obsession with simulating things, this type of furniture was unable to last long on the market.

1 Around 1900, the Thonet company also included furniture made of real bamboo in their product range, but these individual components were not yet bent. In 1905 a "bent bamboo furniture production factory" was established in Radomyšl in Bohemia, but apparently there were technical difficulties in the implementation, so that ultimately only "imitations of light and brown bamboo" were offered. Cf. *ZA* No. 13 from 31 Mai 1905, 4, and *ZA* No. 16 from 25 September 1905, 5 f.

2 Cf. Thonet Catalog from 1895, 49 ff.

Luster Chandelier
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1890; Buche, massiv und gebogen Beech, solid and bent; Firmensammlung Company Collection TON

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Notenständer Nr. 2 Music Stand No. 2
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1880
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1900; Buche, massiv gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid bent, plywood; MAK H 2960/1988

Already in the mid-1850s, it was foreseeable that the demand for Gebrüder Thonet furniture–especially the furnishings for the public sector–would continue to increase rapidly. With the invention of bending solid wood, the technological prerequisite for an increase in production was also accomplished. This made enormous investments in the construction of a factory and the acquisition of the appropriate mechanical equipment appear to be profitable.[1] Thus, the establishment of the first Gebrüder Thonet factory in Koryčany was connected "with an initial cost of about 20,000 guilders."[2] After these investments and the construction of other factories up until the 1870s had proven to be extremely successful, the company then devoted itself to expanding the variety of its furniture types. On the one hand, there was an increase in the furniture which was meant for the private sector; in addition to cradles and music stands, finally even chandeliers were produced in bentwood. On the other hand, the company gradually expanded its product range to include sporting equipment such as sleds, skis, and tennis rackets. These expansions clearly show that the target group for Thonet bentwood furniture was not, as is often assumed, the working class, but rather the middle class.[3]

1 Cf. Peter Ellenberg, "Koritschan. Von der Schreiner-Manufaktur zur Möbelfabrik," in: Exhib. Cat. Munich 2019: *Thonet & Design*, 68–72.
2 Wilhelm Franz Exner, *Das Biegen des Holzes*, Leipzig ²1922, 39.
3 Cf. Robert Keil, "The social and cultural context of bent wood and metal furniture," in: Exhib. Cat. New York 1987: *Bent wood and metal furniture*, 175–196.

Design anno 1880

Sessel Nr. 51 Chair No. 51
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet / August Thonet, um ca. 1880
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1880; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 3100/1989

The two models shown here were offered at approximately the same time–around 1880: Dining room chair No. 4 from J. & J. Kohn and chair No. 51 from Gebrüder Thonet. While the model from Kohn, with its turned rods, incised parts, and elaborate bends, is still completely caught up in the tangled bentwood shrub of Historicism, chair No. 51, which was designed and produced in the factory in Bystřice pod Hostýnem, under the management of August Thonet, looks comparatively modern. With its ingenious construction, clear tectonics, and uniformly strong rod cross-sections, it makes one think of a framework made of iron rather than a piece of furniture made of wood. Just like the classic model No. 14, model No. 51 is made of only six individual components, which achieve great stability through their diagonal bracing.[1] While in this way Thonet created the more progressive furniture in around 1880, only twenty years later, it was from the Kohn company, that impulses for the "modernization" of bentwood furniture emanated: Around the turn of the century, Adolf Loos, Gustav Siegel, Otto Wagner, and Josef Hoffmann had furniture made by Kohn that was more convincing in its design solutions than Thonet's contemporary products.[2]

1 The connecting of the front legs to the seat frame was a problem which had already very much preoccupied Michael Thonet and, as with the Boppard chairs from the early days of Thonet, there are no longer any conventional front legs on model No. 51.
2 After the joint contract awarded to Thonet and Kohn for the furnishing of the Postal Savings Bank, Otto Wagner's designs were mainly produced by Thonet.

Experimente

Salonsessel Nr. 4 Salon Chair No. 4
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet / August Thonet, um ca. 1883
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1890;
Buche, massiv gebogen, Sperrholz, Kunstleder Beech, solid bent, plywood, imitation leather; Firmensammlung Company Collection TON

Sessel Nr. US 538 Chair No. US 538
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1900
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1900;
Buche, massiv und gebogen, gepolstert Beech, solid and bent, upholstered;
Firmensammlung Company Collection TON

Sessel Nr. US 542 Chair No. US 542
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1900
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1900;
Buche, massiv und gebogen, gepolstert Beech, solid and bent, upholstered;
Firmensammlung Company Collection TON

Sessel Chair
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1900
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1900;
Buche, massiv und gebogen, gepolstert Beech, solid and bent, upholstered;
Firmensammlung Company Collection TON

There are some chair models in the TON company's collection in Bystřice pod Hostýnem which do not appear in any of the European sales catalogs; however, two of these models can be found in catalogs for the US. What is particularly exceptional about the four chairs presented here are the differing rectangular wooden profiles, the various possibilities for leg connections and the varied back motifs. Similar models with the same formal and constructive components were gradually introduced as novelties in the Thonet *Zentral-Anzeiger* from 1903 onwards.[1] In addition, in the 1904 catalog, models Nos. 268-275, 361, and 901 each display individual components whose design and formal language are reminiscent of this furniture. The chair with the brown upholstery—undoubtedly the most interesting of these four chairs—was, however, already included in the product range starting from 1883 until the mid-1890s as Salon Chair No. 4, which was formally and constructively identical in the series production.[2] The constructive understanding that is to be seen in this piece of furniture leads one to suspect the authorship or at least the participation of August Thonet.

1 Cf. for example *ZA* No. 1 from 1 September 1903, 7, No. 10 from 1 October 1904, 10 and No. 13 from 31 May 1905, 1 (supplement).
2 The upholstery of this model is faux leather nailed to the original plywood seat. However, the plywood sheet is cut out rectangularly inside, which indicates that this chair was originally meant to be covered with a caned seat.

Sessel Nr. 91 Chair No. 91
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet/August Thonet, um ca. 1890
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, um ca. 1900;
Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 2922/1987

ng the production of the running
alais Liechtenstein, it had been
net's aim to produce chairs that
as possible and extremely stable
time. Even after the invention of
d wood, the company repeatedly
this idea. Whether this was done
c reasons in the hope of possibly
ey on materials or out of pure ex-
py, can hardly be answered today.
y light chair was designed at the
19th century, likely by August
east he was involved in the making
n Bystřice pod Hostýnem in 1890:
1–also called lath chair–was the
f bentwood furniture in which the
s had an oval cross-section. To
is piece of furniture, which was
ragile-looking due to its thin rails,
n the one hand, a leg ring which
quite far down the legs[1], and, on
nd, two laths which crossed in the
ere screwed laterally to the seat
they took over the function of the
e classic models. All of the com-
re connected with specially manu-
rews. Lightweight chairs were re-
issue in the 20th century. Giò Ponti
een one of the most famous de-
ight chairs. After he had designed
a"–which was oriented on the tra-
avari chairs–in 1951, he went on
with the "Superleggera" in 1957:
the legs triangular, he managed to
weight even more without losing

rs later, in some of the Viennese avant-garde
ample in the models for the Cabaret Fledermaus–
comes a u-shaped arch that rests on the floor.

Sessel Nr. 699 Chair No. 699 „Superleggera"
Entwurf Design: Giovanni Ponti, Mailand Milan, 1956
Ausführung Execution: Figli di Amedeo Cassina, Mailand Milan, 1956;
Esche, Geflecht Ash, rush weave; MAK H 2138/1968

In a brief outline of the company's history, Gebrüder Thonet praised the garden armchair No. 4 in their 1904 catalog, calling it one of their best sellers with a sales volume of several hundred thousand units.[1] The garden chairs, with their characteristic, simple and somewhat rustic-looking construction, were offered by Thonet in various designs around the turn of the last century and, in fact, seem to have found widespread use as low-priced furnishings for garden- and terrace restaurants: They conveyed a down-to-earth and unpretentious coziness, free from the refinement of high-class furniture. In the light of the much-talked-about crises since the beginning of the 21st century, both simplicity and reduction, as well as necessity and moderation have become more relevant in recent years: This is reason enough for many young designers to build on proven solutions in their designs, invoking the mood of simple furnishings used in the coffee shops and garden restaurants of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. With his "Feen" chair, created in 2009, the designer Robert Rüf invoked memories of both the traditional rural farm chairs that have survived to this day, especially in the Alpine regions, and Thonet's garden chairs, with their characteristic support of the stiles on the rear legs as models.[2]

1 Cf. Thonet sales catalog 1904, Foreword, Statistical Data, Page b.
2 A structurally comparable solution–the rear stiles are led down onto the rear legs–is also found in some designs by Erich Dieckmann: In the kitchen chair from 1925, the stiles are attached to the lateral strut and the frame, in the children's chairs from 1927 they are bolted to the rear legs and the frame. Cf. Michael Siebenbrodt (ed.), *Entwürfe für die Zukunft, bauhaus weimar*, Weimar 2000, 170, Fig. 232, and Adolf G. Schneck, *Das Möbel als Gebrauchsgegenstand*, Vol. 3, *Der Stuhl*, Stuttgart 1928, 11, Fig. 7.

Sessel Chair „Feen"
Entwurf Design: Robert Rüf, Wien Vienna, 2009
Ausführung Execution: Dür Naturholzmöbel, Alberschwende, 2009; Esche, naturbelassen Ash, untreated; Besitz des Designers Property of designer

Das Möbel aus einem Stück

Sessel Chair
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet / August Thonet, um ca. 1880
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1880; Esche, massiv gebogen Ash, solid bent; Firmensammlung Company Collection TON

Kinderschaukelsessel Children's Rocking Chair
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet / August Thonet, um ca. 1880
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1880; Esche, massiv gebogen Ash, solid bent; Firmensammlung Company Collection TON

Furniture Made from One Single Piece

In the course of the industrialization of furniture production repeated attempts have been made to reduce the various components to one single piece: This attempt to form a piece of furniture from a homogeneous material and in only one piece can be regarded as the phantasm of modern design. Although rarely successful, these efforts often meant that the number of components required was significantly reduced–as in the classic bentwood furniture, where the rear legs, the stiles, and the crest rail were made from a single rod. In the 1880s, the Thonet company experimented with making chairs out of cut in solid bent ash wood panels–these attempts are attributed to August Thonet. But it was not until the invention of plywood–and the ability to produce it in correspondingly large formats–that the foundation was laid for bending sheet-like components on an industrial scale and making them suitable for furniture design. However, it wasn't until 1934 that the designer Gerald Summers first succeeded in making a piece of furniture from just one part and without any further connections: For his iconic armchair "BPAC" (Bent Plywood Arm Chair) seven layers of 3-ply aircraft plywood had to be superimposed, cut to size, coated with a resin glue, put back together, laid in a mold, and pressed. Astonishingly, Summers' method required neither heat nor moisture, as were needed in the other manufacturing processes where wood or plywood is bent.[1] Also aesthetically, Summers' design was successful: For example, Han Pieck's "Bambi Chair" from 1948, which was also made from only one component, seems almost conventional in comparison, although the high-frequency technique–a technologically advanced method at that time–was used for its production.[2]

1 Cf. Thillmann, *Schichten*, Munich 2018, 116–127.
2 For the different methods of bending wood see: Uwe Heise / Otto Eggert, "Plastifizierung von Bugholz mit Hochfrequenz oder Wasserdampf," in: *Die Holzbearbeitung* (HOB) 9/1990, 18–26.

BPAC (Bent Plywood Arm Chair)
Entwurf Design: Gerald Summers, London, 1933
Ausführung Execution: Gerald Summers / Makers of Simple Furniture, London, 1934–39; Sperrholz Plywood; Sammlung Collection Mantz

„Bambi" Chair
Entwurf Design: Han Pieck, 1946–48
Ausführung Execution: Morris of Glasgow, um ca. 1948; Sperrholz Plywood; Sammlung Collection Mantz

Sessel Nr. 221 Chair No. 221
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1897
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, Wsetin Vsetín, Ugrósz, Radomsk, um ca. 1910; Buche, massiv gebogen, Sperrholz, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, plywood, cane; MAK H 2190/1969; Schenkung Bundeskammer der gewerblichen Wirtschaft Donation Federal Chamber of Commerce

Gartensessel Nr. 4 Garden Chair No. 4
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1890
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Wsetin Vsetín, Ugrósz, Radomsk, Frankenberg, um ca. 1910; Buche massiv, eichenartig mit Ölanstrich Beech, solid, oak-like with oil paint; MAK H 3628/2012; Schenkung Donation Design Store Vienna

Sessel Nr. 248a Chair No. 248a
Entwurf Design: J. & J. Kohn, 1901
Ausführung Execution: J. & J. Kohn, um ca. 1901; Buche, massiv gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid bent, plywood; Thonet Frankenberg

Sampling *avar*

The cultural technique of sa
been spoken of only since
digital post-production and
tones in music production
However, the concept of
been transferred to other a
duction in which individual
isting works of art or every
serted in the context of new
anew. In this sense, Adolf
for the Café Museum in V
with which the architect in
arrival of modern architect
troduced the renewal of
before the turn of the ce
scribed as a sampling a
used the well-known s
chair–although caned–and
leg rings the four-part Koh
connection.[2] For the cor
"four-part direct connecti
rest in furniture made of
had been patented in 18
been used in many other
Loos has held himself bac
In contrast to the artistic
ponent Josef Hoffmann
Kohn after the turn of th
looks like a completely "n
ically developed–piece
without any special featu
here about sampling, it
but a functional optimiz
ments in the service of c
Kohn's model No. 248
and first offered for sale
sidered as a simplified v
signed model. Due to t
production in which the
manently changed the
bentwood parts Loos'
only at a very high pric
duction model No. 24
manufacture and there
price.

1 "Looking For The Perfect Beat" f
1983 is considered to be the firs
music. Cf. Ulf Poschardt, *DJ-Cu*
in particular 226 ff.
2 At Thonet this connection was o
3 Patent application of J. & J. Kohn
4 "The chairs, armchairs, half-arm
construction are characterized b
include the following numbers: 2
35, 36, 37, 38, 41, 44, 45, 46, 4
Catalog from 1902.

Ein neuer Schwung für Bugholzsessel

Fauteuil Nr. 715/F Armchair No. 715/F
Entwurf Design: Gustav Siegel, Wien Vienna, 1899
Ausführung Execution: J. & J. Kohn, um ca. 1900; Buche, massiv gebogen, Messing, gepolstert Beech, solid bent, brass, upholstered; MAK H 3107/1989

Fauteuil Nr. 6516a Armchair No. 6516a, aus der Postsparkasse, Wien from the Postal Savings Bank, Vienna
Entwurf Design: Otto Wagner, Wien Vienna, 1904/05
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, 1906; Buche, massiv gebogen, Leder gepresst Beech, solid bent, pressed leather; MAK LHG 1490/1982; Dauerleihgabe Österreichische Postsparkasse AG Permanent loan Austrian Postal Savings Bank Corp.

A New Sway for Bentwood Chairs

As before for the dispatch office of the daily newspaper "Die Zeit" (1902), Otto Wagner also adapted a bentwood chair by Josef Hoffmann student Gustav Siegel, which had already been exhibited at the 1900 World Fair in Paris, for the furnishing of the Postal Savings Bank in Vienna. The key formal innovation of this chair designed by Siegel and produced by J. & J. Kohn was already noted by the art critic and journalist Ludwig Hevesi in an exhibition critique from 1901: "Here is a chair that solves a big problem. The legs are no longer inserted into the frame, but rather continue through the back in one piece. The entire chair consists of three curves."[1] Beyond modern bentwood furniture, Siegel's innovation was to have an effect not only on the design of tubular steel furniture in the late 1920s–just think of Breuer's Model B 34–but also on Post-Modern design. At the beginning of the 1980s, the Japanese designer Toshiyuki Kita took up the characteristic continuous line of the front legs into the backrest for the three-legged "Tacchi" chair. At the beginning of the 1990s, the Italian designer Andrea Branzi also recreated Siegel's solution in his "Revers" chair. However, here this solution did not serve as a constructive supporting element, but primarily as a formal-aesthetic element.

1 Ludwig Hevesi, "Österreichisches Museum. Ausstellung der Wiener Kunstgewerbeschule" (1901), in: the same, *Acht Jahre Sezession* (1906), Klagenfurt 1984, 335–340: 336.

Armlehnsessel Armchair „Revers"
Entwurf Design: Andrea Branzi, Italien Italy, 1993
Ausführung Execution: Cassina Spa, Italien Italy, 2010; Buche, massiv gebogen, Sperrholz, Aluminium Beech, solid bent, plywood, aluminum;
MAK H 3464/2010

Sessel Chair „Tacchi"
Entwurf Design: Toshiyuki Kita, Japan, um ca. 1985
Ausführung Execution: Aidec, Japan, um ca. 1985; Buche, massiv gebogen, Aluminium, Leder, gepolstert Beech, solid bent, aluminum, leather, upholstered;
MAK H 3967/2019

Sessel Chair „Locus Solus“
Entwurf Design: Gae Aulenti, Mailand Milan 1964
Ausführung Execution: Poltronova, um ca. 1975; Stahlrohr, Kunstleder, gepolstert Tubular steel, imitation leather, upholstered; Privatsammlung Private Collection

Gustav Siegel's armchair for the 1900 World Fair in Paris was the first example of the so-called "architectural furniture," which displayed a completely new language vocabulary: Bentwood furniture was modernized: Front legs, armrests, and crest rail are made of a continuous single rectangular rod. Otto Wagner repeatedly took up this new type of design in the following years and developed simplified variants for the dispatch office of "Die Zeit" as well as for the Postal Savings Bank in Vienna. Likely in response to this development, initiated by J. & J. Kohn, to experiment with the new possibilities for expression in bentwood furniture, Gebrüder Thonet presented armchair No. 201 in the *Zentral-Anzeiger* from 30 April 1904. This armchair was undoubtedly inspired by Gustav Siegel's model. However, this model seems strangely undecided, mainly due to the round-sectioned rods.[1] In a sense, Le Corbusier's beloved B 9–actually the desk armchair No. 6009–could also be considered the predecessor to the armchair No. 201: Again, a single component forms the inner crest rail and rear legs. However, on the B 9 the armrests are like an extension of the outer crest rail and are conventionally fastened laterally to the seat frame; the front legs are inserted in the seat. In the mid-1960s, the architect Gae Aulenti developed a garden furniture set for the Italian furniture manufacturer Poltronova, whose armchair revives the form of Thonet's No. 201 and translates it into tubular steel: Until today this piece of furniture has remained a model for a variety of low-cost seating for the so-called outdoor segment.

1 In the *ZA* there is a matching two-seater bench drawn by hand, which was however not produced.

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Fauteuil Nr. 201 Armchair No. 201
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1904
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1910; Buche, massiv gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid bent, plywood; Privatsammlung Private Collection

Schreibfauteuil Nr. 9 (Kohn Nr. 712) Armchair No. 9 (Kohn No. 712)
Entwurf Design: J. & J. Kohn, 1900
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1910; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; Privatsammlung Private Collection

on cabinet, manufactured
as first presented at the
the Austrian Museum of
1901/02: "It is the only
the company's sales pro-
produced after a design by
f construction, this salon
on an innovative system,
the company's other bent-
ich was shown in this ex-
anufactured: "Bent-wood
losed within bent-wood
in a Kohn company adver-
agazine *Hohe Warte* from
offmann is named as the in-
"system design." Christian
rticular, has pointed to the
s with attribution and the
er it might have been a col-
Hoffmann and Moser.[3] This
stem, with its clear geomet-
ary, is interesting, not least
se of framing as one of the
ns to be characteristic of
sm. The decorative cabinet
vas designed just a few years
tely rooted in the idea of the
u style; it was presented in
nzeiger No. 13 from 31 May
ed in various versions in
same year in Supplement I
og. This cabinet was one of
of Thonet furniture to be
ass shoes; as a further con-
odern design vocabulary of
e, Gebrüder Thonet also used
s-sections. However, they
bending radii, which evoked
elegant modernity found in
ystem.

g, "Koloman Moser – Ein Multitalent der
hib. Cat. Vienna/Basel 2018: *Koloman*
also *Kunst und Kunsthandwerk*, 5th year,

"Bent-wood production and the Viennese
t and Kohn firms, 1899–1914," in: Derek
Wood and Metal Furniture 1850–1946,
O: 110.

ecorative Cabinet No. 3
brüder Thonet, 1905
on: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan
10; Buche, massiv und gebogen,
ssing Beech, solid and bent,
s; Sammlung Collection Snoeckx

Moderne Zweckmäßigkeit: Der „Nutz-Stil“

Etagère Shelf aus der Postsparkasse, Wien
from the Postal Savings Bank, Vienna
Entwurf Design: Otto Wagner, Wien Vienna, 1906
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, 1906; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Aluminium Beech, solid and bent, aluminum; MAK LHG 1488/1982; Dauerleihgabe Österreichische Postsparkasse AG Permanent loan Austrian Postal Savings Bank Corp.

Modern Practicality: The "Utility Style"

Otto Wagner most likely entrusted his co-worker and former student Marcel Kammerer with the actual drafting of his bentwood furniture designs for the furnishing of the Postal Savings Bank in Vienna (1904–06).[1] Among these pieces of furniture–developed of course under Wagner's responsibility and leadership–there are various types of armchairs, chairs and stools, as well as shelves and serving tables whose functionality and lightness are distinguished by their clear lines and transparency and which therewith conform to the *Nutz-Stil* [Utility Style] propagated by Wagner.[2] The decoratively used aluminum cover plates and fittings of the furniture refer to the building façade, which Wagner had given the expression of the Machine Age through the equally ornamental and functional use of aluminum-covered iron bolts. For the Thonet and Kohn companies, the furnishing of the Postal Savings Bank was an economically lucrative major project: In order not to play off the competitors against each other, the order for the production of bentwood furniture was issued to both companies in 1906.[3] However, the serial production of the models was later given exclusively to Thonet, which also included some of Kammerer's own designs in its program: These are mainly based on constructive and formal elements similar to those in the Postal Savings Bank furniture.[4]

1 Cf. Iain Boyd Whyte, *Emil Hoppe, Marcel Kammerer, Otto Schönthal*, Berlin 1989, 47.
2 Otto Wagner, *Einige Skizzen, Projekte und ausgeführte Bauwerke*, vol. 1, Vienna 1889.
3 The cost estimates for these orders from the Austrian Postal Savings Bank have been in the MAK under the inventory number KI 23280 since 2018.
4 Cf. Jiří Uhlíř, *Vom Wiener Stuhl zum Architektenmöbel*, Vienna, i.a. 2009, 142 f. See also Paul Asenbaum et al., *Otto Wagner*, Vienna/Salzburg 1984, as well as Christian Witt-Döring, *Otto Wagner Möbel*, Vienna 1991.

Servante Side Table, aus der Postsparkasse, Wien
from the Postal Savings Bank, Vienna
Entwurf Design: Otto Wagner, Wien Vienna, 1906
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, 1906;
Buche, massiv und gebogen, Aluminium Beech, solid and bent, aluminum;
BAWAG P.S.K.

Tisch Nr. 40 Table No. 40
Entwurf Design: Marcel Kammerer, Wien Vienna, 1905
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1910;
Buche, massiv und gebogen, Messing Beech, solid and bent, brass;
MAK H 2276/1974

Vienna Lines

There are various armchair variations from Otto Wagner's student and office employee Marcel Kammerer for Thonet, which seem to have been equally inspired by the furnishings of Wagner's Postal Savings Bank in Vienna and furniture designs by Josef Hoffmann executed by the J. & J. Kohn company.[1] When the modern bentwood furniture from the time around 1900 came back into fashion in the 1980s, Kammerer's models in turn served as models for new furniture designs. The architect Adolf Krischanitz transformed a design by Kammerer into an extremely opulent, almost throne-like seating object of Post-Modernism for the series of furniture created–and later given the beautiful title "Wiener Linien"[2] – as part of the renovation of the Vienna Secession. In contrast, Heimo Keindl–at that time technical director and member of the Gebrüder Thonet Vienna board of executives–moved so close to the model of Kammerer's armchair with his design, that it initially appears to be the same model. It isn't until a comparison is made, that the changed proportions and reduced frame, which are aimed at a different use, manifest themselves: Keindl's armchair designed for dining tables and tight-fitting conference tables, which was also available as a "half-armchair" with shortened armrests, allows for a completely different sitting posture due to the altered leg connection and seat frame shape.

1 Cf. Iain Boyd Whyte, *Emil Hoppe, Marcel Kammerer, Otto Schönthal*, Berlin 1989, 46 ff.
2 Cf. Edelbert Köb (ed.), *Adolf Krischanitz. Das Inventar ist das Ergebnis der Inventur*, Vienna 2016.

Fauteuil Nr. 6534 Armchair No. 6534
Entwurf Design: Marcel Kammerer, Wien Vienna, 1910
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca.1910; Buche, massiv gebogen, gepolstert Beech, solid bent, upholstered; Sammlung Collection Yvan & Francine Snauwaert

Fauteuil Nr. 10-754F Armchair No. 10-754F
Entwurf Design: Heimo Keindl, Wien Vienna, 1982
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet Vienna, Friedberg, 1983; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Leder, gepolstert Beech, solid and bent, leather, upholstered; Sammlung Collection Heimo Keindl

Umhüllende Armlehnsessel

Armlehnsessel Nr. 729/F Armchair No. 729/F
Entwurf Design: Josef Hoffmann, Wien Vienna, 1907/08
Ausführung Execution: J .& J. Kohn, um ca. 1910; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Leder, gepolstert Beech, solid and bent, leather, upholstered; MAK H 3101/1989

Armlehnsessel Nr. 728/F Armchair No. 728/F
Entwurf Design: Josef Hoffmann, Wien Vienna, 1905/06
Ausführung Execution: J. & J. Kohn, um ca. 1910; Buche, massiv und gebogen gepolstert Beech, solid and bent, upholstered; MAK H 3640/ 2013

Armlehnsessel Armchair
Entwurf Design: Hans Günther Reinstein, Hannover, 1908
Ausführung Execution: Pressstoff-Möbel-Gesellschaft, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1913; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Wellpappe, weiß gefasst Beech, solid and bent, corrugated cardboard, painted in white; MAK H 2442/1977

Variation von Fauteuil Nr. 423 (ohne Rückenpolsterung)
Variation of Armchair No. 423 (without back upholstery)
Entwurf Design: J. & J. Kohn, 1908
Ausführung Execution: unbekannt unknown, um ca. 1910; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid and bent, plywood; Sammlung Collection Piva

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Sessel Nr. 728 Chair No. 728
Entwurf Design: Josef Hoffmann, Wien Vienna, 1905/06
Ausführung Execution: J. & J. Kohn, um ca. 1910; Buche, massiv und gebogen, gepolstert Beech, solid and bent, upholstered; MAK H 2870/1987; Schenkung Donation Stefan und and Paul Asenbaum

After the turn of the century, a form of armchair which seems to have been derived from the armchair of the so-called *Fledermaus Set*, presumably designed by Josef Hoffmann for J. & J. Kohn in 1905/06, became a popular piece of furniture: This set was already published and exhibited in 1906, but it was not until 1907 that Hoffmann used chair model No. 728–which was also later included in Thonet's program–for the furnishings of the *Cabaret Fledermaus*, from which the name *Fledermaus Set* emerged.[1] Armchair No. 728/F is made up of a u-shaped horizontal rail that forms both the armrest and the crest rail. The four legs are joined into a u-shaped base. Just above the middle of the legs, an appropriately formed suspended seat frame is stabilized with four balls on the underside of the seat. Among the variants derived from this model is the model No. 729/F, which Hoffmann used in the salon of his small country house at the Vienna *Kunstschau* in 1908. This model is supported by evenly spaced rods rather than four legs; a construction, which was then taken up by Marcel Kammerer in his armchair No. 761.[2] Around 1900, enclosed, barrel-shaped armchairs, in which painted corrugated cardboard replaced the wooden rods[3]–in accordance with a patent from Hans Günther Reinstein–emerged, in addition to such "rod armchairs."

1 Cf. Giovanni Renzi, *Il mobile modern*, Milan 2008, 164–171. Renzi ascribes the set to Gustav Siegel, but to us the evidence–as with some of the other attributions of authorship in this book–does not seem compelling enough to fundamentally question the previous attributions.
2 Cf. *ZA* No. 27, 19 July 1910, 16.
3 Cf. Vera J. Behal, *Möbel des Jugendstils*, Munich 1981, 232 and 346.

With his furniture object "Hoffmann," created in 2012, the artist Ovidiu Anton made reference to the classic-modern nesting tables which are widely used in various designs: Sets of several nestable side tables, which were produced by various bentwood furniture manufacturers in 1900. In their formally most reduced version, they are still attributed–although without concrete proof–to Josef Hoffmann and produced as supposed "design classics." For his side tables, produced by himself personally in careful joinery work, Anton used discarded safety barrier boards from Viennese construction sites–material from the street, which was brought back in form as an exquisite home accessory. For the artist, the transformation processes were the deciding factor: Worthless waste wood is upgraded by craftsmanship and infiltrates distinguished living rooms–or museum furniture collections–in the form of an expensive design classic. The ban created by the barrier is converted into a request for use.[1]

1 Cf. Sebastian Hackenschmidt, "Die Moderne im Rückspiegel. Möbelhafte Reminiszenzen an 'Wien 1900'," in: Exhib. Cat. Vienna/Basel 2018: *Koloman Moser*, 264–281.

Satztische Nesting Tables „Hoffmann"
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: Ovidiu Anton, Wien Vienna, 2012
Absperrbretter von Straßenbaustellen Safety barrier boards from road construction sites;
MAK H 3627-1/2012

Liegefauteuil Nr. 670 Lounge Armchair No. 670 „Sitzmaschine“ [Sitting Machine]
Entwurf Design: Josef Hoffmann, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1905
Ausführung Execution: J. & J. Kohn, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1906; Buche, massiv gebogen, Sperrholz, Messing Beech, solid bent, plywood, brass; MAK H 3927/2017

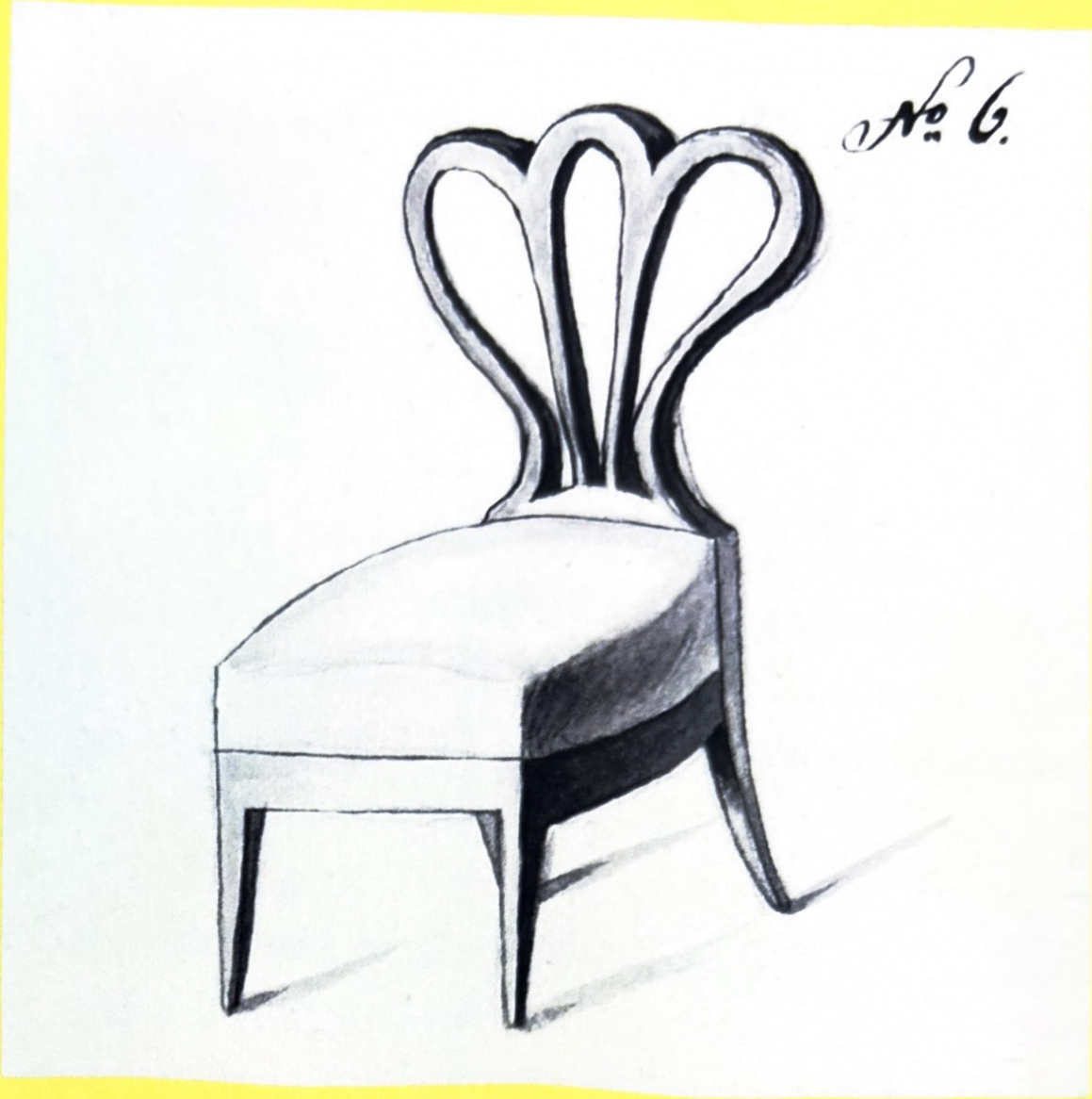
Fauteuil Armchair „Morris"
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1904
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, um ca. 1910; Buche, massiv gebogen, Messing, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, brass, cane; MAK H 2925/1987

Ruhefauteuil mit verstellbarer Rückenlehne Nr. 500
Reclining Armchair with adjustable backrest No. 500
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: D. G. Fischel Söhne, Niemes Mimoň, um ca. 1905; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Geflecht, Metall Beech, solid and bent, cane, metal; MAK H 3734/2013

The "Morris Chair," often–but so far without concrete evidence– attributed to Otto Prutscher, was offered in different variations by Gebrüder Thonet starting in 1904: In addition to the version with round-sectioned rods shown here, there was also one with grooved square bars, a lavishly executed salon armchair, and two children's variations.[1] As the name already implies, this type of comfortable reclining armchair was associated with William Morris, who in the 1880s, with his firm Morris & Company, had already produced a design by William Watt, now commonly known as the "Morris Chair".[2] The famous bentwood armchair No. 670 by Josef Hoffmann which was produced by J. & J. Kohn in 1906 and presented at the *Kunstschau* in 1908, can be traced back to this model. Due to its nearly rectangularly formed and geometrically arranged bentwood components as well as the square and rectilinear perforations in the side panels and back of the chair, this piece of furniture, which is usually shown without the originally intended seat cushions, is now one of the most famous designs of Viennese Modernism.[3] However, the nickname "sitting machine" was only later propagated by the art market and does not come from the turn of the century. Yet another bentwood producer, D. G. Fischel, also added a "Morris Chair" to its product line in 1910; in the company catalogs it was offered as a "reclining armchair with adjustable backrest."

1 Cf. Thonet Catalog from 1904 and the corresponding supplements from 1905/06 and 1907 and the Catalog from 1911/15.
2 Cf. David A. Hanks, *Innovative Furniture in America from 1800 to the Present*, New York, 1981.
3 Cf. Giovanni Renzi, *Il Mobile Moderno: Gebrüder Thonet Vienna; Jacob & Josef Kohn*, Milan 2008, 160 as well as Giovanni e Chiara Renzi, *Curve e Biondi Riccioli Viennesi. Mobili in Faggio curvato da Michael Thonet ad Antonia Volpe*, Milan 2000 (See therein: J. & J. Kohn Catalog from 1906, 41).

Sessel Chair
Entwurf Design: Josef Hoffmann, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1910
Ausführung Execution: J. & J. Kohn, um ca. 1910; Buche, massiv und gebogen,
Sperrholz Beech, solid and bent, plywood; MAK WI 880/1911



Joseph Ulrich Danhauser, Modell Nr. 6 aus dem Katalog der Sesselentwürfe, Federzeichnung, laviert, Wien, 1820er Jahre Joseph Ulrich Danhauser, model No. 6 from the catalog of chair designs, pen and ink drawing, washed, Vienna, 1820s; MAK KI-8971-947

Sessel für die Ausstellung Chair for the exhibition „Das befreite Handwerk", Wien Vienna 1934
Entwurf Design: Josef Hoffmann, Wien Vienna, 1934
Ausführung Execution: Johann Soulek, Wien Vienna, 1934; Nuss, massiv, geschnitzt, Leder, gepolstert Walnut, solid, carved, leather, upholstered; MAK H 1701/1934

Probably around 1910 the J. & J. Kohn company produced a decorative looking bentwood chair by Josef Hoffmann which in some way already seemed to anticipate the design vocabulary of Art Déco.[1] The model, with its expressively curved and delicate backrest, was made for the winter exhibition of the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry, but was not included in Kohn's catalogs. Presumably, the elaborate design, in which the rear legs make a transition from a square to a circular cross-section partway up the backrest, appeared to be unsuitable for mass production at that time. This applies all the more to the chair with the opulently carved backrest in curved forms, which Hoffmann presented more than twenty years later at the exhibition *Das befreite Handwerk* [The Liberated Craft]. The exhibition which took place in 1934, also in the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry, was a very explicitly formulated "challenge to the ever diminished pure form of the merely objective"[2] and wanted to undertake a national-conservative attempt to liberate the domestic handicrafts, which were being threatened by "economic subsistence"[3] through competition from mechanical production.

1 Cf. Vera J. Behal, *Möbel des Jugendstils*, Munich 1981, 140f.
2 Richard Ernst, „Zum Ausstellungsprogramm", in: Exhib. Cat. Vienna 1934: *Das befreite Handwerk*, 13.
3 Oswald Hertl [=Haerdtl]: Foreword, in: ibid., 5–7: 6.

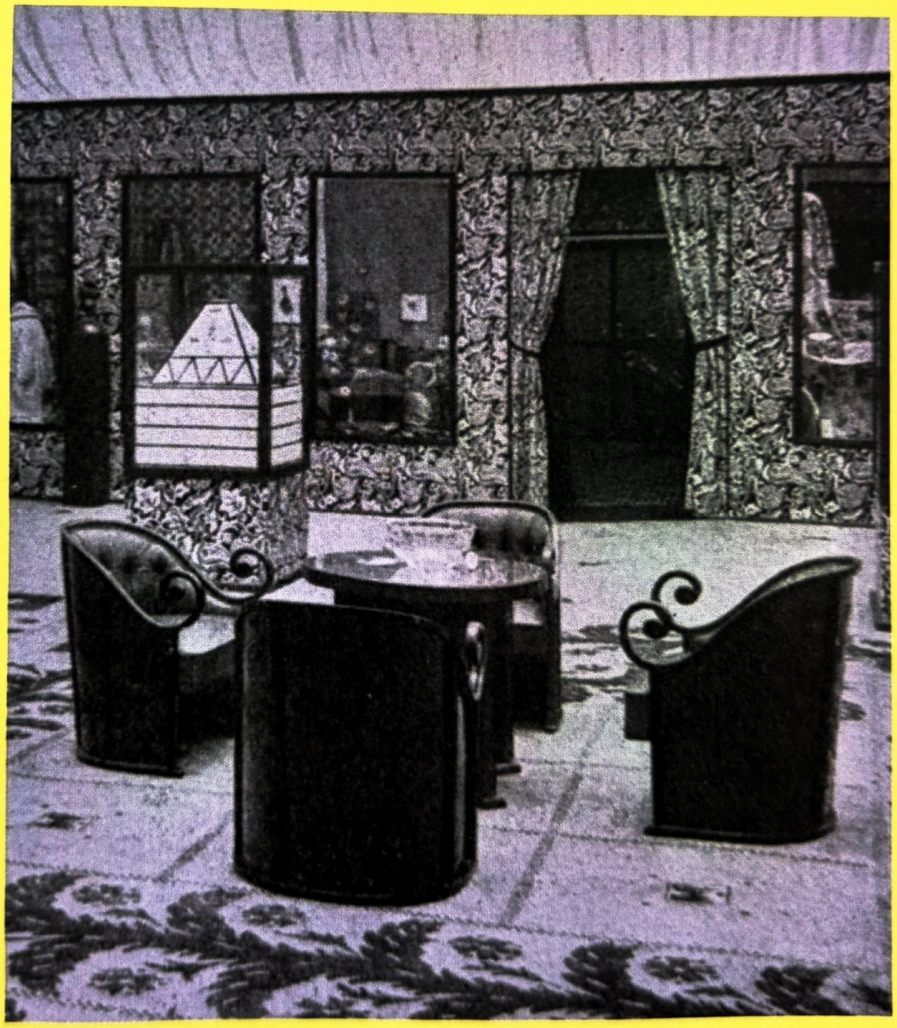
Fauteuil Nr. 1519-O Armchair No. 1519-O „Capua“
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1910
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, um ca. 1913;
Buche, massiv und gebogen Beech, solid and bent; Sammlung Collection Klaus Engelhorn

It was not until 1913, over a decade after his notorious Café Museum (1899), that Adolf Loos was able to furnish another café in Vienna, the Café Capua. An admirer of Anglo-Saxon culture, Loos once again chose comfortable bentwood seating, namely the Thonet furniture models 519-O and 1519-O which were derived from the classic Windsor chairs which are popular in North America.[1] Also in the 1920s, simple bentwood furniture was still widely used by contemporary architects to furnish modern interiors: Le Corbusier, for example, appreciated the Thonet model No. 6009, which he selected, among others, for his Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau in 1925. In an essay published in 1929, Loos approved of Le Corbusier's preference for bentwood furniture in principle–but simply suggested that he was using "the wrong model" in his buildings: Presumably Le Corbusier's choice did not seem comfortable enough for him and was also impractical because the armrests were too high for a dining armchair. Loos claimed that he had already been calling the bentwood chair "the only modern chair" since 1898, and announced that the Thonet chair would be the successor of the dying classical joiner's chair.[2] He was not completely wrong with his prophecy, albeit in the end it was not the bentwood chairs but rather the chairs made of tubular steel produced by the Thonet company since 1929, which were to become at least the chairs of the next decade.[3]

1 Cf. Eva B. Ottillinger, *Adolf Loos. Wohnkonzepte und Möbelentwürfe*, Salzburg/Vienna 1994, 127ff.
2 Adolf Loos, „Josef Veillich" (1929), in: the same, *Sämtliche Schriften 1*, ed. von Franz Glück, Vienna/Munich 1962, 436–442: 442. In the Thonet Catalog from 1914/15 the Capua chair and armchair had the numbers 519-O and 1519-O, whereby the O referred to the saddle seat made of solid wood. In the 1915 supplement, the armrests were made in two parts.
3 Cf. Otakar Máčel, *2100 Metal Tubular Chairs*, Rotterdam 2006.

Schreibfauteuil Nr. 9 (Kohn Nr. 712) Desk Armchair No. 9 (Kohn No. 712)
Entwurf Design: J. & J. Kohn, 1900
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1910;
Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 2924/1987

Kohn und Thonet auf der Werkb



Josef Hoffmann: Ausstellungsraum von J. & J. Kohn
auf der Werkbundausstellung 1914 in Köln
(aus: *Österreichische Werkkultur*, Wien 1916, 61)
Josef Hoffmann: Exhibition space of J. & J. Kohn
at the 1914 Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne
(in: *Österreichische Werkkultur*, Vienna 1916, 61)

Nach der großen Wiener Kunstschau von
1908 markiert

Kohn and Thonet at the 1914 Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne

Armlehnsessel Armchair, präsentiert auf der Werkbundausstellung in Köln 1914
presented at the Werkbund exhibition in Cologne 1914
Entwurf Design: Otto Prutscher, Wien Vienna, 1914
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1914; Eiche, geschnitzt; Buche, massiv und schichtverleimt, gepolstert; Oak, carved, beech, solid and laminated, upholstered;
MAK H 2302-1/1975

Otto Prutscher, Ausstellungsraum der Gebrüder Thonet auf der Werkbundausstellung 1914 in Köln, (aus: *Österreichische Werkkultur*, Wien 1916, 60)
Otto Prutscher, Exhibition space of Gebrüder Thonet at the 1914 Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne (in: *Österreichische Werkkultur*, Vienna 1916, 60)

After the great Viennese *Kunstschau* of 1908, the exhibition of the German *Werkbund* in Cologne in 1914 marked another milestone in Josef Hoffmann's work for J. & J. Kohn: The showroom of the company designed and furnished by Hoffmann displayed various seating groups and a wide variety of inventive individual chairs. The superiority of Kohn's furniture over Thonet's production becomes clear in the comparison of one of Hoffmann's armchairs with a comparable piece of furniture designed by Otto Prutscher, both of which were presented at the exhibition in Cologne. While Hoffmann develops his design consistently out of the possibilities provided by bentwood and molded plywood–while the rod forming the back and the armrests tapers in two ornamental, upward curving volutes–Prutscher's armchair consists primarily of richly decorated oak wood. The backrest, which reaches down to the runners, and the fluted, ball-crowned front legs are opulently covered with carvings. Both the u-shaped base and the armrests, which reach down to the base, are made of bent laminated beech veneers which are treated to match with the oak wood. The latter reach down to base, both components are treated as well to match with the oak wood.[1]

1 Cf. Vera J. Behal, *Möbel des Jugendstils*, Munich 1981, 234.

Tisch Nr. 8352 Table No. 8352, präsentiert auf der Werkbundausstellung in Köln 1914
presented at the Werkbund exhibition in Cologne 1914
Entwurf Design: Otto Prutscher, Wien Vienna, 1914
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, 1914; Weichholz, Eiche, Sperrholz Softwood, oak, plywood; Firmensammlung Company Collection TON

In the course of Classicism and the ideal of the distinguished simplicity of antiquity propagated by Johann Joachim Winckelmann, the simplicity of everyday objects in the time around 1800 seems to have been granted its own aesthetic quality for the first time.[1] In contrast to the previous style epochs, the furniture was now of unaffected elegance, it held itself back in terms of decoration and was relatively straightforward and functional; the simple forms were emphasized only by selected veneer patterns. After the façade-like exploration of outdated styles that was typical in 19th century Historicism, the Secessionist architects and decorators in Vienna began in around 1900 to increasingly develop the construction of buildings and interiors from the point of view of functionality and material suitability: Especially with the furniture, the conception of wood as a simple and easy-to-process material could be taken into account. As the table and the plant stand from Thonet clearly indicate, the time between 1800 and 1830 also often still served as an important source of inspiration during the First World War.[2]

1 Cf. Detlev Schöttker, "Reduktion und Innovation. Die Forderung nach Einfachheit in ästhetischen Debatten zwischen 1750 und 1995," in: Gerhart von Graevenitz (ed.), *Konzepte der Moderne* (=DFG-Symposion 1997), Stuttgart/Weimar 1999, 331–349.
2 Cf. Exhib. Cat. Vienna 1981: *Moderne Vergangenheit: Wien 1800–1900.*

<
Frisierstockerl Hairdresser's Stool
Entwurf Design: unbekannt unknown,
Österreich Austria, um ca. 1825; Nuss Walnut;
MAK SOB 13/1956

Nachtkästchen Bedside Locker, aus Interieur für
from the interior furnishings for Dr. Hugo Koller, Wien Vienna
Entwurf Design: Josef Hoffmann, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1905
Erle, massiv, Messing, Marmor Alder, solid, brass, marble; MAK H 2873-1/1983;
Schenkung Donation Hugo Josef Mair

Nachtkästchen Nr. 23.031 Bedside Locker No. 23.031,
aus der Garnitur 23.000 from the set 23.000
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1911
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, um ca. 1912;
Buche, massiv, Sperrholz, Messing, Marmorplatte Beech, solid, plywood,
brass, marble top; Sammlung Collection Werner

Concepts of simplicity and expediency, such as deliberate formal reduction or dispensing with decorations, ornaments and other representative forms of expression, have been used time and again since the 1800s as a stylistic starting point for the design of modern everyday objects. Starting from the straightforward and geometric basic forms, the economic use of the means and the increasing attention to the usability led to functional, simple, and smooth furniture already in the Biedermeier Era. The general renunciation of bronze appliqués and artistic ornaments resulted in the beauty of the often consistent–and yet still comparatively elaborately designed–veneered surfaces being emphasized.[1] After the stylistic escapades of Historicism, the simple products from the Biedermeier Era were again modern and often served as a point of departure for the design of contemporary everyday objects at the beginning of the 20th century.[2] The choice of cost-effective materials or a pragmatic surface treatment with lacquer paints often made things even easier, as is demonstrated by a small bedside table by Josef Hoffmann. The bentwood furniture manufacturers also increasingly turned to simple furniture without any bent parts to be able to offer complete room furnishings–so-called "sets"[3]. In addition to larger carcass furniture, these sets included smaller types, such as washing stands or bedside tables, whose surface treatment often imitated a high quality execution in expensive woods such as mahogany.

1 Cf. Exhib. Cat. Vienna i.a. / Ostfildern 2006: *Biedermeier*.
2 Cf. Sebastian Hackenschmidt, "Einfache Wiener Möbel," in: *MAK/Zine* 1, 2012, 8–27. See also Detlev Schöttker (ed.), *Ästhetik der Einfachheit*, Berlin 2019.
3 Cf. Thonet Catalog, 1904, 105 ff.

Klubsessel Club Chair B 3 „Wassily"
Entwurf Design: Marcel Breuer, Dessau, 1925
Ausführung Execution: Gebr. Thonet AG, Frankenberg, 1930–1935; Stahlrohr, erneuerte Textilbespannung Tubular steel, refurbished textile cover; MAK H 2934/1987

Starting in the mid-1920s, completely new chair designs were possible through the consistent use of tubular steel, a material that had previously hardly ever been used for furniture. In addition to unruly meandering structures, whose tortuosity even surpassed the repertoire of bentwood furniture forms. This included the so-called "cantilever chairs," which, according to an idea by the architect Mart Stam, could made do with two instead of four legs: The resilience and stability of tubular steel allowed for cantilevered constructions in which the loading forces could be diverted by the front legs alone. Due to the lack of rear legs the seat slightly gave way, achieving a pleasant, springy, vibrating effect, which made upholstery unnecessary.[1] In order to emphasize the lightness and transparency of the cantilever chairs, initially brightly colored membranes made of eisengarn were used. This was stretched over the rods as pure surfaces–seemingly without any volume–and thus seemed to emphasize the importance of the framework. Nevertheless, soon upholstered cantilever models were designed, the opulently exhibited seating comfort of which displayed a certain tendency toward "bourgeoisification." So Thonet produced, from 1932 onward, the so-called "K-Line," which consisted only of upholstered tubular steel models that had previously been made by the Knoll company. Within a very short period of time, the cantilever chair had evolved from an avant-garde formalist design to a standardized, mass-compatible piece of furniture.[2]

1 Cf. Exhib. Cat. Vienna 2006: *Cantilever Chair*.
2 See also Werner Möller / Otakar Máčel, *Ein Stuhl macht Geschichte*, Munich / Dessau 1992, 91.

Freischwinger Cantilever Chair KS 41
Entwurf Design: Anton Lorenz, Deutschland Germany, um ca. 1931
Ausführung Execution: Gebr. Thonet AG, Frankenberg, um ca. 1935; Stahlrohr, Holz, gepolstert
Tubular steel, wood, upholstered; MAK H 3341/2003; Schenkung Donation Heidemarie Bernhard

Freischwinger Cantilever Chair MR 10 (MR 533)
Entwurf Design: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Deutschland Germany, 1927
Ausführung Execution: Gebr. Thonet AG, Frankenberg, um ca. 1931;
Stahlrohr, Eisengarn Tubular steel, eisengarn; MAK H 3089/1990

Tubular Steel and Bentwood

Sessel Chair B 403
Entwurf Design: Ferdinand Kramer, Frankfurt am Main, 1927
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Mundus, um ca. 1930; Buche, massiv gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid bent, plywood; MAK H 3015/1988

At a preparatory meeting for the Stuttgart *Werkbund* exhibition in 1926, the architect Mart Stam presented a sketch for a cantilever tubular steel chair without rear legs. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe immediately took up the idea and presented his own model in the Weissenhofsiedlung in 1927–the first that brought the elastically resilient properties of the material to bear.[1] For the avant-garde architects of the 1920s, tubular steel was the appropriate material to express new spatial concepts in their interiors. With its constructivist lines and functionally reduced language, tubular steel furniture seemed to correspond to the ideal of objectivity and transparency, of technical innovation and mechanical production. These ideas also had an impact on the design of bentwood furniture in the 1920s. Since the daring constructions of the tubular steel furniture could not be implemented with bentwood, designers and architects had to be content with less spectacular solutions. In their reduction and expediency, however, designs such as the chair which Ferdinand Kramer designed for the vocational education academy in "New Frankfurt" were no less convincing–and usually even more suitable for industrial series production.[2]

1 Cf. Werner Möller / Otakar Máčel, *Ein Stuhl macht Geschichte*, Munich / Dessau 1992, 9 ff.
2 Cf. Ferdinand Kramer, "Funktionelles Wohnen," in: Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung (ed.), *Das Schicksal der Dinge. Beiträge zur Designgeschichte*, Dresden 1989, 74–80.

Freischwinger Nr. 317 (B 34) Cantilever Chair No. 317 (B 34)
Entwurf Design: Marcel Breuer, Deutschland Germany, um ca. 1929
Ausführung Execution: J. A. Talos, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1932; Stahlrohr, Holz, Eisengarn
Tubular steel, wood, eisengarn; MAK H 2239-1/1971; Schenkung Donation Erna Bude

nstructive possibilities and its cool
he shiny chrome-plated tubular steel
natched the design principles of
lichkeit [New Objectivity]: The ma-
was hardly ever used for furniture
5 did not lead one to think of the
ech forests like a Thonet chair did,"
its technoid-functionalist appear-
inded one of a "constructed ma-
early tubular steel chairs were ini-
red or nickel-plated before chrome
nd received programmatic meaning:
should not just be metal, it should
he more metallic, the better. Thus,
plating soon became an easily un-
le style feature."[2] Thonet Mundus
tubular steel fashion in the late
ntering the tubular steel business
1929 bought up Standard Möbel
Desta in 1932. At the same time,
d new bentwood designs in their
ge, the design vocabulary of which
he characteristic constructions of
. In order to adapt the "bentwood
me furniture" even more to the
ime, the company decided to offer
nainly in synthetic colored lacquer,
wood structure was supposed to
ly concealed.[3]

gn-Geschichte in Deutschland, Cologne 1987, 160.
führung", in: Jan van Geest / Otakar Máčel, *Stühle*
ne 1980, 7–52: 22. However, tubular steel
available in many colors at Thonet in the 1930s.
n Vegesack, *Deutsche Stahlrohrmöbel*, Munich

el als Wohnungsmöbel," in: *Thonet-Mundus*
No. 100, December 1929, 2–3.

Fauteuil Armchair A 64 F
Entwurf Design: Adolf Gustav Schneck, Stuttgart, um ca. 1928
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Mundus, um ca. 1928; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid and bent, plywood; MAK H 2587-2/1979

Freischwinger Cantilever Chair B 263/V
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: Gebr. Thonet AG, Frankenberg, um ca. 1935, Intern. künstlerisches Urheberrecht International artistic copyright: M. Stam; Stahlrohr, Buche, massiv gebogen, Sperrholz Tubular steel, beech, solid bent, plywood; Privatsammlung Private Collection

Freischwinger Cantilever Chair B 32
Entwurf Design: Marcel Breuer, Deutschland Germany, 1928/29
Ausführung Execution: Gebr. Thonet AG, Frankenberg, 1930er Jahre 1930s; Stahlrohr, Buche, massiv und gebogen, Geflecht Tubular steel, beech, solid and bent, cane; Privatsammlung Private Collection

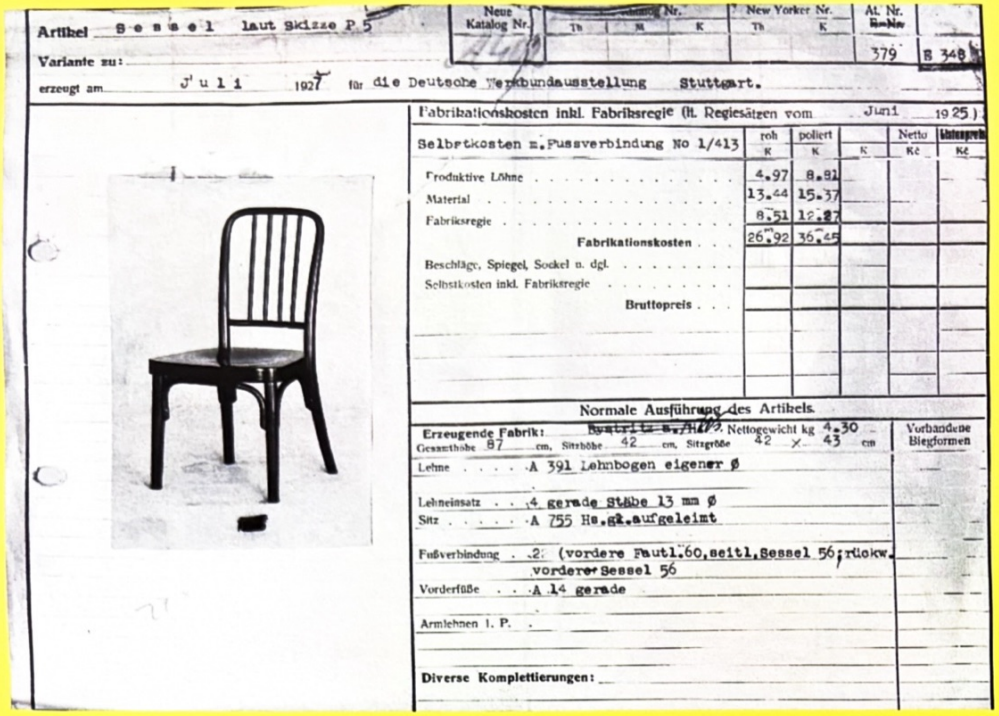
Hybrid Tubular Steel Furniture

Although until 1929 Marcel Breuer's tubular steel furniture was manufactured almost exclusively by Standard Möbel GmbH, the tubular steel cantilever chair B 32 was produced by Gebrüder Thonet.[1] This model–which is now better known under the name "Cesca"[2]–advanced to become a modern classic, not least because Breuer made use of the typical caned seat of the well-established bentwood chairs, thus making its design especially in tune with "the product range and the tradition of the furniture manufacturer Gebrüder Thonet": Considered "that *Wiener Geflecht* [Viennese caning] had become just as much a hallmark of the famous Gebrüder Thonet coffee house chairs as bentwood was," then Breuer's concept for this chair obviously lay in a "symbiosis of references to the technically contemporary as well as the historically established."[3] The concept of connecting the cold and chrome-gleaming tubular steel frames with other–warmer and haptically more pleasant–materials set a precedent: As one of the first Alvar Aalto–who was as convinced of the technical and constructive rationality of tubular steel chairs as he was of the resiliency that made free-floating sitting possible[4]–combined a u-shaped tubular steel frame with a resilient molded plywood seat and backrest, creating such a "hybrid" chair.[4] In the early 1930s, a similar model was created with B 247, also at Thonet in Frankenberg, but unlike Aalto's chair, here the plywood seat is mounted on a bentwood frame. The curved back is bolted, as an independent element, to the frame.

1 The original version of this model is usually dated 1928/29. However, archival proof for this has not been found. For more on this discussion see: Werner Möller / Otakar Máčel, *Ein Stuhl macht Geschichte*, Munich / Dessau 1992, 29, Note. 54.
2 As an abbreviation of the name of Marcel Breuer's daughter Francesca. Cf. Eckart Bergmann, *Marcel Breuers Freischwinger B 32/64*, Detmold 1997.
3 Cf. Möller/Máčel 1992, 29.
4 Sebastian Hackenschmidt, "Frei Schwingen. Stühle als Materialexperiment," in: Exhib. Cat. Vienna 2006: *Frei Schwingen*, 31–68: 34 ff.
5 Marcel Breuer and Gunnar Asplund provided the "templates" for this. Cf. Göran Schildt, "Aalto's first modern furniture," in: the same, *Alvar Aalto, The decisive years*, New York 1986, 33–39.

Freischwingender Stuhl, Modell 23 Cantilever Chair, Model 23
Entwurf Design: Alvar Aalto, Finnland Finland, 1929/30
Ausführung Execution: Oy Huonekalu-ja Rakennustyötehdas AB, Turku, 1930er Jahre 1930s; Stahlrohr, Sperrholz, Leder Tubular steel, plywood, leather; Privatsammlung Private Collection

Freischwinger Cantilever Chair B 247
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: Gebr. Thonet AG, Frankenberg, um ca. 1932; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Stahlrohr, Sperrholz Beech, solid and bent, tubular steel, plywood; Sammlung Collection Mantz



Artikel Sessel laut Skizze P 5 — Neue Katalog Nr. 402 — Alte Katalog Nr. — New Yorker Nr. — At. Nr. 379 — B 348

Variante zu: —

erzeugt am Juli 1927 für die Deutsche Werkbundausstellung Stuttgart.

Fabrikationskosten inkl. Fabriksregie (lt. Regiesätzen vom Juni 1925)

Selbstkosten m. Fussverbindung No 1/413

	roh K	poliert K		Netto Kč	Bruttopreis Kč
Produktive Löhne	4.97	8.81			
Material	13.44	15.37			
Fabriksregie	8.51	12.27			
Fabrikationskosten	26.92	36.45			
Beschläge, Spiegel, Sockel u. dgl.					
Selbstkosten inkl. Fabriksregie					
Bruttopreis					

Normale Ausführung des Artikels

Erzeugende Fabrik: Bystřice n. H. — Nettogewicht kg 4.30

Gesamthöhe 87 cm, Sitzhöhe 42 cm, Sitzgröße 42 × 43 cm

Vorhandene Biegformen

Lehne . . . . A 391 Lehnbogen eigener Ø

Lehneinsatz . . . 4 gerade Stäbe 13 mm Ø

Sitz . . . . . A 755 Hs. gz. aufgeleimt

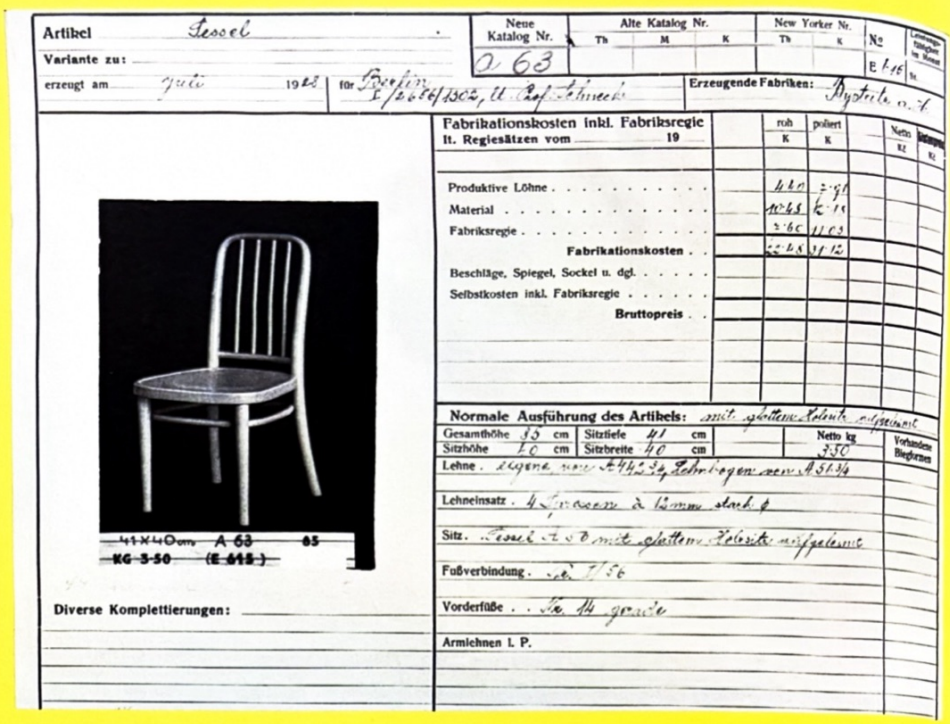
Fußverbindung . . 2: (vordere Fautl. 60, seitl. Sessel 56; rückw. vorderer Sessel 56

Vorderfüße . . . A 14 gerade

Armlehnen l. P. .

Diverse Komplettierungen: —

Karteikarte von Thonet Mundus für Modell A 402 von Josef Frank, 1927
Index card from Thonet Mundus for model A 402 by Josef Frank, 1927



Artikel Sessel — Neue Katalog Nr. 2 63 — Alte Katalog Nr. — New Yorker Nr. — Nr. E 415

Variante zu: —

erzeugt am Juli 1928 für Breuer I/2664/1302, Prof. Schneck — Erzeugende Fabriken: Bystřice n. H.

Fabrikationskosten inkl. Fabriksregie lt. Regiesätzen vom 19

	roh K	poliert K		Netto Kč	Bruttopreis Kč
Produktive Löhne	4.20	7.91			
Material	10.65	12.19			
Fabriksregie	7.65	11.63			
Fabrikationskosten	22.50	31.73			
Beschläge, Spiegel, Sockel u. dgl.					
Selbstkosten inkl. Fabriksregie					
Bruttopreis					

Normale Ausführung des Artikels: mit gestellem Polster aufgeleimt

Gesamthöhe 83 cm, Sitzhöhe 50 cm, Sitzbreite 40 cm, Sitztiefe 41 cm, Netto kg 3.50

Vorhandene Biegformen

Lehne . eigene von A 44 2 Sy Lehnbogen wie A 51 46

Lehneinsatz . 4 Sprossen à 13 mm stark Ø

Sitz . Sessel A 5 0 mit gestellem Polster aufgeleimt

Fußverbindung . wie A 756

Vorderfüße . . wie 14 gerade

Armlehnen l. P.

Diverse Komplettierungen: —

41 × 40 cm A 63 65 KG 3.50 (E 415)

Karteikarte von Thonet Mundus für Modell A 63 von Adolf Gustav Schneck, 1928
Index card from Thonet Mundus for model A 63 by Adolf Gustav Schneck, 1928

In 1927, the architect Josef Frank designed three bentwood furniture pieces, which were then executed by Thonet, for the furnishing of his duplex in the Weissenhof housing development in Stuttgart: chair A 403, armchair A 403 F, and chair A 402. As can be seen from the company index cards of the Czech Thonet successor TON, which still produces its furniture in the bentwood factory in Bystřice pod Hostýnem, which was built by Gebrüder Thonet in 1861, in 1928 Thonet Mundus' product range was supplemented with two pieces of furniture which were obviously derived from Frank's A 402 model: chair A 63 and armchair A 63 F.[1] These models, which were designed

by the architect Adolf Gustav Schneck most likely at the request of the company, were probably intended to form matching counterparts– which Frank himself obviously did not attach great importance to.[2] We do not know if there was competition between the two architects, but in his book *Der Stuhl* [The Chair], which was published in 1928, Schneck reproduced Frank's designs A 403 F and A 402 (as well as the rocking chair B 836) without mentioning Frank's name, although he explicitly referred to the importance of copyright protection in the preface.[3] The fact that Frank claimed these models for himself, however, is documented by a design drawing in the archive of Svenskt Tenn, which prompted the Swedish furniture store to restart the production of model A 402 as number P 5 in 2014.[4]

1 Cf. Jiří Uhlíř, "Josef Frank als Entwerfer für Thonet-Mundus," in: Exhib. Cat. Vienna/Basel 2016: *Josef Frank*, 198–205. See also Karl Mang, *Thonet Bugholzmöbel*, Vienna 1982, in particular 123 f.

2 Thus, the armrest variant A 402 F of chair A 402, which was included in the index in 1931, was probably also designed without Frank's participation. Cf. Uhlíř, ibid., 200.

3 Cf. Adolf G. Schneck, Foreword, in: the same, *Der Stuhl*, Stuttgart 1928, 5–8: 6.

4 The fact that Model A 403 F is attributed to Schneck in a Thonet company advertisement in the magazine *Innendekoration* published in January 1929 is most likely a mistake.

Ruhefauteuil Low Armchair A 403 F
Entwurf Design: Josef Frank, Wien Vienna, 1927
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Mundus, Wsetin Vsetín, um ca. 1930; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid and bent, plywood; MAK H 2773/1984; Schenkung Donation Maria Günter

Sessel Chair P 5 (A 402)
Entwurf Design: Josef Frank, Wien Vienna, 1927
Ausführung Execution: Svenskt Tenn, Schweden Sweden, 2015; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid and bent, plywood; MAK H 3896/2016; Schenkung Donation Svenskt Tenn

Fauteuil Armchair A 63 F
Entwurf Design: Adolf Gustav Schneck, Stuttgart, 1928
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Mundus, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1930; Buche, massiv gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid bent, plywood; MAK H 2770/ 1984; Schenkung Donation Maria Günter

Sessel Chair A 63
Entwurf Design: Adolf Gustav Schneck, Stuttgart, 1928
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Mundus, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1930; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid and bent, plywood; MAK H 2586/1979

Armlehnsessel Armchair B 945 F
Entwurf Design: Thonet Mundus, um ca. 1928
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Mundus / Gebr. Thonet AG, bis until 1939;
Buche, massiv und gebogen Beech, solid and bent; MAK H 3104/1990;
Schenkung Donation Erika Fellerer

Sessel Chair B 936
Entwurf Design: Thonet Mundus, um 1928
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Mundus / Gebr. Thonet AG, bis until 1939;
Buche, massiv und gebogen Beech, solid and bent; MAK H 3739/2013

rm possibly reached the zenith of
ble and decorative adjustment to
f the human body in the early years
enth century. The Windsor or stick
vas an entirely functional solution
he problem of seating," wrote the
nor John Gloag in his 1934 book
rt Explained.[1] The architect Josef
often based his own furniture de-
is proven type, was likewise con-
this was true of the English and
Windsor chairs. Frank was less con-
inventing new creations than with
nonymous traditions in the service
and coziness for his time. In this
ustrian architect also appreciated
onding Windsor models produc-
net, which he not only frequently
s interior decoration, but also in-
he product range offered by his
decorating firm Haus & Garten.[2]
r the turn of the century, Gebrüder
eady offered two variations of
nairs, referred to as "modern arm-
s program.[3] Only at the end of the
his chair type to be found again at
s machine-made standardized fur-
se chairs are the great exception
Viennese joiner's furniture otherwise
y Frank.[5]

dustrial Art Explained, London 1934, 134 f., 143 f.
is one of the suppliers of Haus & Garten which was
set registration demanded by the National Socialists
ustrian State Archive AT-OeStA/AdR E-uReang VVSt
W 20824 (2nd supplement to the questionnaire
938).
t Catalog from 1904, 47. The first proof of this
e found in the *ZA* No. 2 from 17 October 1903.
m 1928 there are a total of six models, including the
and B 945/F presented here.
Hackenschmidt, "Typification through Craftsmanship:
ture Culture between Carpentry and Mass
: Exhib. Cat. Vienna/Basel 2016: *Josef Frank,*

Armlehnsessel Armchair, aus Haus Beer, Wien from Villa Beer, Vienna
Entwurf Design: Josef Frank, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1930
Ausführung Execution: Haus & Garten, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1930; Nuss, massiv und gebogen
Walnut, solid and bent; MAK H 3750/2014; Schenkung Donation Dr. Strohmayer Stiftung

The furnishing of the tobacco factory in Linz, built by Peter Behrens between 1928 and 1935, was aligned in its materiality and design with the overall work of art character of the facility: Through the use of different seat heights, the tubular steel chairs were functionally adapted to the company's different workstations.[1] As a material, tubular steel did indeed convey cool objectivity and technical modernity, but it seemed, like many extravagant pieces of tubular steel furniture from the 1930s, to be rather formalistic–"with the result that it seems to take no end [...] that it–if necessary–would entwine the whole structure or a large part of it in one piece in meandering turns, that it would rather go back and forth or bend in loops than to create corners which have to be welded."[2] Deviating from the strict functionalist style of rational objectivity and unadorned practicality, Behrens' tubular steel chair seems almost mannerist.[3] The plywood armchair "Draco" by designer Stefan Lindfors, produced by the Finnish furniture company Asko in 1993, seems to have developed from a comparable design attitude.

1 Cf. Exhib. Cat. Linz/Salzburg 2010: *Tabakfabrik Linz*.
2 Schuldt: Zur Einführung, in: Jan van Geest / Otakar Máčel, *Stühle aus Stahl*, Cologne 1980, 7–52: 21.
3 Cf. Exhib. Cat. Vienna 2011: *Industriemöbel*.

Armlehnsessel Armchair „Draco"
Entwurf Design: Stefan Lindfors, Finnland Finland, 1993
Ausführung Execution: Asko, Finnland Finland, 1993; Schichtholz, Sperrholz
Laminate, plywood; MAK H 3965/2019; Schenkung Donation Designmuseo Helsinki

In addition to tubular steel chairs, Thonet's product range at the beginning of the 1930s included stools, sofas, beds, wardrobes, writing and side tables, various shelves, cabinets, umbrella stands, and plant stands also made of tubular steel. However, criticism of the new material, which was often perceived as cold, hard, unusual or even inhuman, spread increasingly. Furthermore, tubular steel furniture was seen as a fad offering neither an economic nor an aesthetic reason to prefer it to wooden furniture.[1] In his 1931 book *Architecture as Symbol*, the Austrian architect Josef Frank also polemicized against the tubular steel chairs with their cubic forms, which he regarded as the epitome of Bauhaus aesthetics and "German New Building." As an expression of an almost militant radicalism in the standardization and homogenization of design approaches, Frank even considered the use of tubular steel in the circles of the German *Werkbund* as a parallel to the renewed military mobilization of Germany: "Steel is not a material; it is a worldview. These chairs were actually conceived to offer the reparations inspector a seat that would demonstrate the earnestness of German endeavors."[2] And in an ironic allusion to the poem entitled "*Vaterlandslied,*" written by the nationalist author Ernst Moritz Arndt in 1812, Frank added: "The God who made iron grow did not want wooden furniture."[3] With his decorating firm Haus & Garten, which he had run in cooperation with Oskar Wlach since 1925, Frank made his case for functional furniture which was simple but elegant and artfully crafted from wood; for him metal was suitable only for garden furniture, plant stands, and lamps.

1 One of the critics was Alvar Aalto. Cf. Alvar Aalto, "Finnische Möbel aus gepreßtem Holz," in: Werner Blaser, *Alvar Aalto als Designer*, Stuttgart 1982, 92 f.
2 Josef Frank, "Architecture as Symbol" (1931), in: *Josef Frank. Writings Vol. 2, Published Writings 1931–1965*, ed. by Bojankin/Long/Meder, Vienna 2012, 9–183: 133.
3 Ibid, 133.

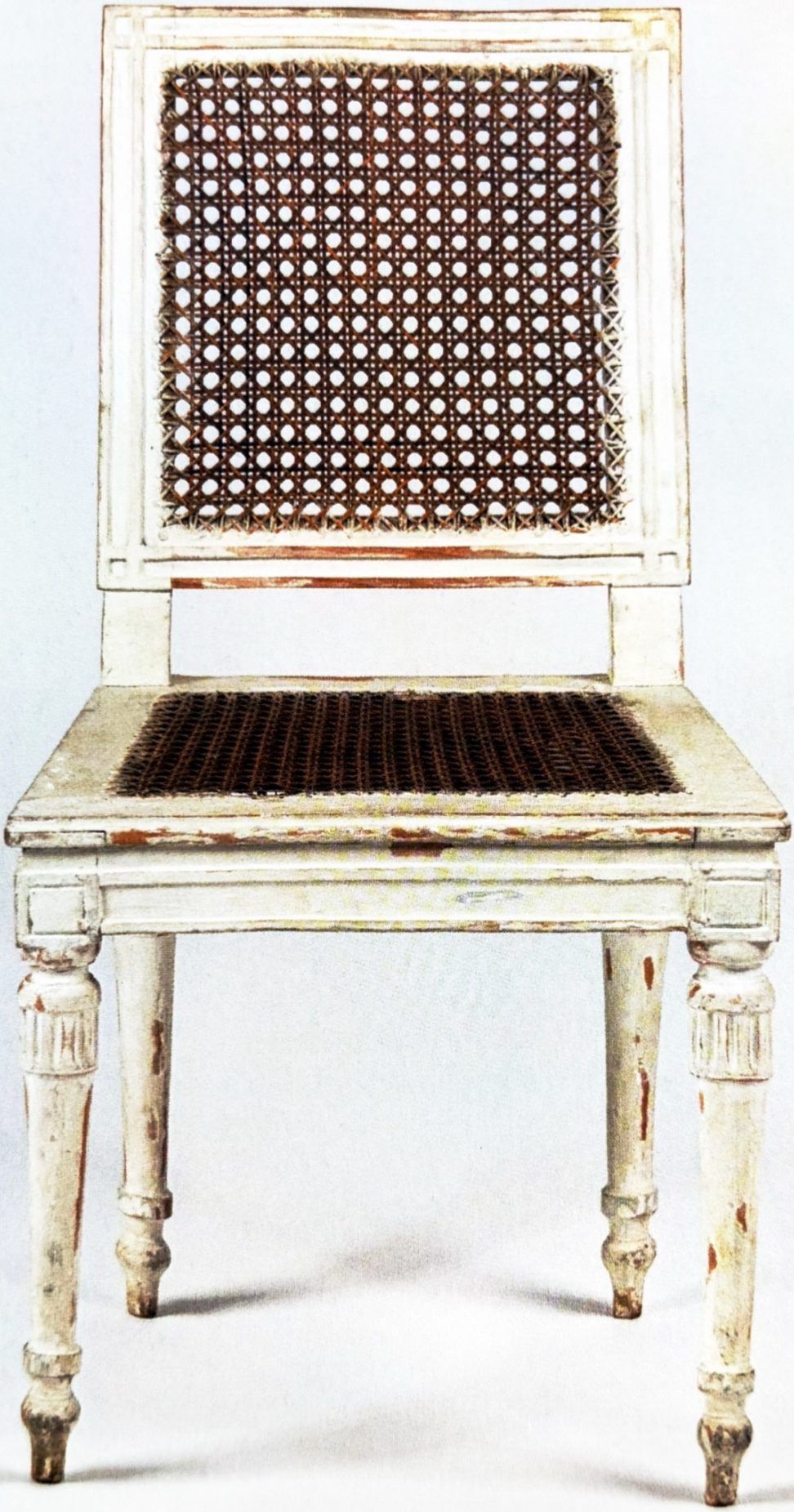
Blumentisch Plant Stand
Entwurf Design: Josef Frank, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1930
Ausführung Execution: Julius Theodor Kalmar Metallwerkstätten, Wien Vienna, um ca. 19
Metall, rot lackiert Metal, painted red; MAK H 2775/1984; Schenkung Donation Maria C

Sessel Chair „Landi", für die Schweizerische Landesausstellung
in Zürich for the Swiss Federal Exhibition in Zurich, 1939
Entwurf Design: Hans Coray, Zürich Zurich, 1938
Ausführung Execution: P. & W. Blattmann Metallwarenfabrik, Waedenswil
(Schweiz Switzerland), 1939; Aluminium-Legierung, formgepresst
Aluminum alloy, compression molded; Privatbesitz Private Property

Sessel Chair für die Wiener Stadthalle (Re-Edition)
for the Stadthalle in Vienna (Re-Edition)
Entwurf Design: Roland Rainer, Wien Vienna, 1952
Ausführung Execution: Tischlerei Waldbauer, Pöchlarn, 1993; Buche, Sperrholz
Beech, plywood; MAK H 3187 / 1993; Schenkung Donation Eichinger oder Knechtl

designer Hans Coray used the motif for his aluminum chair "Landi" designed for the 1939 Swiss National Exhibition in Zurich. Circular perforation was also offered in the seat and backrest, which was molded from one sheet of aluminum, since this allowed rainwater to flow through it better when the chair was used outdoors. In the late 1950s, it was the architect Roland Rainer, who designed the so-called "Stadthallensessel," as part of the furnishings of his civic center in Vienna. The molded plywood seat and backrest of this chair is characterized by the hole pattern in the backrest. Like Coray's "Landi," which until now has been re-introduced in several new editions, Rainer's "Stadthallensessel" was re-launched at the instigation of the architect Gregor Eichinger in the mid-1990s and temporarily put into production with slight structural improvements.

1 Cf. Sebastian Hackenschmidt, "Zwischen den Stühlen. Zu den Möbeln von Adolf Krischanitz," in: Edelbert Köb (ed.), *Adolf Krischanitz*, Vienna 2016, 51–90: 70.



Sessel Chair A 811/1
Entwurf Design: Josef Hoffmann, Wien Vienna, 1930
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Mundus, um ca. 1930; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Eisen, Geflecht Beech, solid and bent, iron, cane; MAK H 3041-1/1989

Sessel Chair „Silver II"
Entwurf Design: Vico Magistretti, Italien Italy, 1991
Ausführung Execution: De Padova, Mailand Milan, 1991; Aluminium, Polypropylen Aluminum, polypropylene; MAK H 3184/1993

After the opulent forms of Baroque and Rococo, the white chair from the furnishings which were commissioned by Archduke Joseph II of Austria for Schloss Hof marks the simplification of the design vocabulary which took place in the course of Classicism, and which was to culminate in a "stylistic minimum" in the "clean, practical lines" of the Biedermeier.[1] The covering of the seats and backrests with caning is, due to its strict symmetry and the recessed carving, aesthetically much more effective than in the earlier courtly furniture from the time of Maria Theresa, in which the curving shapes of the legs, the backrest, and the decorative work initially caught the eye. The same applies to Josef Hoffmann's model No. A 811/1 produced by Thonet Mundus as a variant of the chair with a circular perforated plywood backrest designed for the café at the Vienna *Werkbund* exhibition in 1930: Here too, the extensive use of caning, framed only by a thin bentwood frame, has in a sense replaced the decoration and now has an ornamental effect of its own.[2] In Vico Magistretti's "Silver II" model, which was created at the beginning of the 1990s, it seems to be a postmodern "paraphrase" of Hoffmann's chair: Completely in keeping with Gottfried Semper's theory of "change of material," aluminum tubes have replaced bentwood elements and perforated plastic inserts replace the caning.[3]

1 Cf. Ernst Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (1918), Frankfurt am Main 1985, 25.
2 Both models 811 and 811/1 were so popular with the customers that "a serial production of these models [was] set up at the factory in Bystřice," making it possible for prices to be lowered. Cf. *Thonet-Mundus Zentralanzeiger* No. 109, Dec. 1931, 5.
3 Cf. Gottfried Semper, *Die vier Elemente der Baukunst*, Braunschweig 1851. See also Ákos Moravánszky, *Stoffwechsel*, Basel 2018.

Korbmöbel und Möbelkörbe

Fauteuil Armchair B 1001
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: Thonet Mundus, um ca. 1935; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Geflecht, Polster Beech, solid and bent, cane, cushion; MAK H 3108/1989

Armlehnsessel Armchair
Entwurf Design: Josef Zotti, Wien Vienna, nach after 1900
Ausführung Execution: Prag-Rudniker Korbwaren-Fabrication, Wien Vienna, nach after 1900; Rattanrohr, Peddigrohrgeflecht Rattan cane, wickerwork; MAK H 2623/1981; Schenkung Donation Gino Wimmer

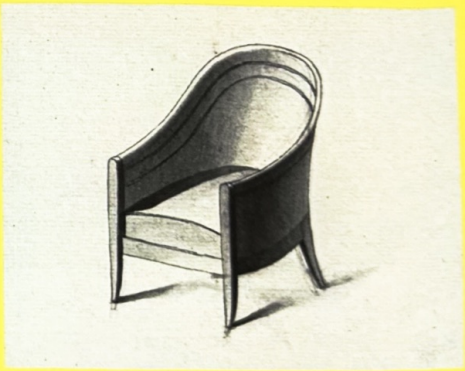
As in the production of bentwood furniture, co-operation with well-known designers and architects took place with wicker furniture at the turn of the century as well, among them in Austria were Koloman Moser, Josef Zotti, Hans Vollmer and Wilhelm Schmidt, and in Germany

Armlehnsessel Armchair
Entwurf Design: Hans Vollmer, Wien Vienna, 1901–14
Ausführung Execution: Prag-Rudniker Korbwaren-Fabrication, Wien Vienna, 1901–14; Weichholz, Rattanrohr, Peddiggrohrgeflecht Softwood, rattan cane, wickerwork; MAK H 3031/1989

Armlehnsessel Armchair „Hideout"
Entwurf Design: Front, Stockholm, 2015
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet Vienna – Wiener Design, Turin, 2015; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht, gepolstert Beech, solid bent, cane, upholstered; MAK H 4000/2019; Schenkung Donation Gebrüder Thonet Vienna – Wiener Design

the likes of Henry van de Velde, Peter Behrens and Richard Riemerschmid.[1] One of the popular types was a barrel-like closed construction, open only to the front and at the top, as is also the case with armchairs from the Biedermeier Era, whose rounded sides were usually lined inside with fabric. In the case of wicker furniture, on the other hand, wicker made from rattan, also known as Spanish cane, was used: The frames, made with thicker stocks of rattan palm–so-called Malacca stocks[2]–were covered or connected with elastic wickerwork. Also the characteristic woven cane, the so-called *Wiener Geflecht* [Viennese Caning], which was used for covering the seat and the backrest of bentwood furniture starting from the 1850s, is made from processed cane material from rattan palms. In contrast, the Thonet Mundus model No. B 1001, which was created in the mid-1930s and is opulently upholstered, uses *Wiener Geflecht* for the entire chair, in the same way as the wicker furniture that this armchair resembles in form.[3] The comfortable, enveloping construction was taken up by the designer group Front 2015 for their "Hideout Lounge Chair" produced by Gebrüder Thonet Vienna, in which the walls were pulled all the way up to shield the users from the outside: As the name "Hideout" suggests, it was about giving the act of sitting a certain amount of privacy.

1 Cf. Eva B. Ottillinger, *Korbmöbel*, Salzburg/Vienna 1990.
2 Around 1930, designer Erich Dieckmann, in particular, developed daring wicker furniture designs, in which the curves of the Malacca stocks were scarcely inferior to the bends of tubular steel furniture. Cf. Erich Dieckmann, *Möbelbau in Holz, Rohr und Stahl*, Stuttgart 1931.
3 A 1930s American Thonet catalog also features a range of wicker furniture, including chairs similar to the designs of Josef Zotti and Hans Vollmer.



Joseph Ulrich Danhauser, Entwurf für einen Fauteuil, Federzeichnung, laviert, Wien, 1820er Jahre
Joseph Ulrich Danhauser, Design for an armchair, pen and ink drawing, washed, Vienna, 1820s; MAK KI-8971-708

Fauteuil Armchair A 60F
Entwurf Design: Thonet Mundus, 1929
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Mundus, Bistritz Bystřice, 1930er Jahre 1930s;
Buche, massiv gebogen, gepolstert Beech, solid bent, upholstered;
MAK H 3748/2013

Schaukelfauteuil Rocking Armchair B 860
Entwurf Design: Thonet Mundus, um ca. 1930
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Mundus, Bistritz Bystřice, 1930er Jahre 1930s;
Buche, massiv und gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid and bent, cane;
Kunstgewerbemuseum Museum of Arts and Crafts, Prag Prague

The Return of the Side Frame Chairs

The side frame chairs from the first half of the 19th century–seating furniture, with the seat and backrest installed between two side frames–all had four legs. In the course of the use of tubular steel for furniture, comparable constructions were produced in the 1920s, but at this time they didn't end in individual legs, but rather in runners. In around 1930 this also affected the bentwood furniture: For example, the side frames of the model A 60 F, designed by Thonet Mundus in 1929, each consist of a solid bent rod. In regard to the A 860 rocking chair–in which the side panels are designed as slightly curved runners–the *Zentralanzeiger* stated that the model "is based on the still fashionable tubular steel construction, but in terms of structural strength, they are superior to tubulat steel furniture."[1] The chair from the Tatra company from the 1930s also has a side frame of rectangular bent solid wood. The construction insinuates a frame made of one piece; however, the runners are inserted only to reinforce the u-shaped bent side frames and do not touch the floor: Actually, this chair is back on four feet. In 1966, Verner Panton reiterated the idea of the continuous side frame with his Thonet model 270 F. However, its side frame construction is not made of solid bent wood, but–as was the case with the Thonet furniture from the Bop-pard period–of laminated beech. And even the Panton frame is not bent from one single piece, but of two identical u-shaped components, which are inserted into each other below the bolting of the seat.[2]

1 *Thonet-Mundus Zentralanzeiger* No. 99, Special issue July 1929, 3.
2 This design is due to a more economic production process.

Armlehnsessel Armchair
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: Tatra Werke, Bratislava, 1930er Jahre 1930s; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz, Metall Beech, solid and bent, plywood, metal; MAK H 3736/2013

Armlehnstuhl Armchair 270F
Entwurf Design: Verner Panton, Dänemark / Deutschland Denmark / Germany, 1965/66
Ausführung Execution: A. Sommer, Plüdershausen, für for Thonet Frankenberg, 1966–71; Buche, schichtverleimt, Sperrholz, Aluminium Beech, laminated, plywood, aluminum; Thonet Frankenberg

Bopparder Fauteuil Boppard Armchair
Entwurf Design: Michael Thonet, Boppard, um ca. 1836
Ausführung Execution: Michael Thonet, Boppard, 1836–41; Buche, schichtverleimt, Nussfurnier, Weichholz, gepolstert Beech, laminated, walnut veneer, softwood, upholstered; Firmensammlung Company Collection TON

At the beginning of the 1840s, Michael Thonet described the resiliency of the chairs and armchairs as one of the decisive advantages of his new laminated veneer technique–"qu'il présenter à une certaine élasticité, comme un ressort plus ou moins bandé."[1] The contemporary exhibition reports on Thonet's furniture also repeatedly pointed out "a pleasant resiliency in the back and armrests of the chairs."[2] Due to the continuous development of this material technology, almost a hundred years later even cantilever seating furniture could be produced using laminated wood: With his laminated armchair No. 31, introduced in 1932, the architect and designer Alvar Aalto succeeded in doing what had until recently been believed to be possible only in tubular steel furniture. Like Michael Thonet did with his Boppard chairs, he used a side frame construction–only now without rear legs. The cantilever chair designed by Garth Chester in 1944, on the other hand, is not made of laminated wood but of a single molded and cut-in plywood panel mounted on two wooden rails.[3] Thus, the so-called "Curvesse Chair" is the first cantilever chair made of plywood–a material which is really not known for its resiliency and is light but also rigid. In its one-piece version with the cuts for the armrests, the "Curvesse Chair" is a formal reminder of Gerald Summers' "BPAC" [Bent Plywood Arm Chair], created ten years earlier, as well as the chair designs by Han Pieck, both of which stand firmly on four legs.

1 French patent application from 16 November 1841, in: Robin Rehm / Christoph Wagner (ed.), *Designpatente der Moderne 1840–1970*, Berlin 2019, 418.
2 H. Rößler, *Verhandlungen des Gewerb-Vereins für das Großherzogtum Hessen*, Darmstadt 1843, 37.
3 Cf. Douglas Lloyd Jenkins, *40 Legends of New Zealand Design*, Auckland 2006, 31–33.

Freischwingender Stuhl, Modell 31
Cantilever Chair, Model 31
Entwurf Design: Alvar Aalto, Helsinki, um ca. 1931
Ausführung Execution: Oy Huonekalu-ja Rakennustyötehdas AB, Turku, um ca. 1935; Birke, massiv und schichtverleimt, Sperrholz Birch, solid and laminated, plywood; MAK H 2956/1987

„Curvesse Chair"
Entwurf Design: Garnet Campbell „Garth" Chester, Auckland, 1944
Ausführung Execution: Garnet Campbell „Garth" Chester, Auckland, um ca. 1950; Sperrholz, gebogen, Massivholz Plywood, bent, massive wood; Sammlung Collection Mantz

„Siesta Medizinal“
Entwurf Design: Hans Luckhardt, Berlin, 1936
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet AG, um ca. 1938; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Leder, Metall Beech, solid and bent, leather, metal; Thonet Frankenberg

„Siesta Medizinal“
Entwurf Design: Hans Luckhardt, Berlin, 1936
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet AG, um ca. 1938; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Lederpolster, Metall Beech, solid and bent, leather cushion, metal; MAK H 3638/2013

Canadian vs. Sitting Machine

Kanadier Canadian
Entwurf Design: Oskar Strnad, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1925
Ausführung Execution: unbekannt unknown, um ca. 1925; Mahagoni, Textilpolster Mahogany, textile cushion; MAK H 2565/1978; Schenkung Donation Rosl Weiser

Kanadier Canadian
Entwurf Design: Clemens Holzmeister, Wien Vienna, 1920er Jahre 1920s
Ausführung Execution: unbekannt unknown, 1920er Jahre1920s; Eiche, Textilpolster Oak, textile cushion; MAK H 3620/2012

Kanadier Canadian, aus Interieur für from interior furnishings for Frau Ms. C. Neubacher, Wien Vienna
Entwurf Design: Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, Wien Vienna, 1925
Ausführung Execution: unbekannt unknown, 1925; Nuss, Textilpolster Walnut, textile cushion; MAK H 3168-1/1992

Until the interwar years in Austria, the so-called Morris Chairs–as they were produced shortly after the turn of the century, for example by Gebrüder Thonet, but also by architects and designers such as Henry van de Velde or Gustav Stickley–had developed into the widespread model type referred to as the Canadian: For the most part a tasteful armchair made of solid wood with a backrest which could be adjusted in various positions and deep, upholstered cushions. As a comfortable piece of seating furniture which could create a calming space in the room, it was used by many different architects, such as Oskar Strnad, Hugo Gorge, Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, Clemens Holzmeister, and Ernst Plischke. In Germany, however, in the context of Neue Sachlichkeit, the alleged optimization of "Sitting Machines" in the service of "efficient" seating comfort was achieved: As the architectural historian Julius Posener ironically noted in 1932, this should be a "fully articulated chair, which mechanically adapts to any movement, even the smallest and involuntary movement."[1] In continuation of the American patent furniture movement–whose sophisticated mechanisms had a positive effect on the improvement of seating comfort in motor vehicles[2]–architect Hans Luckhardt developed such a sitting machine in the mid-1930s (the "Siesta-Medizinal") also for Thonet.[3] This was supposed to result in a piece of furniture "whose seat, backrest and leg-rest could be adjusted in the appropriate, proportionally predetermined inclinations using certain–synchronized–gears and without having to lock the seat in the respective reclining position."[4]

1 Julius Posener, "Stuhl oder Sitzmaschine? Neues Wohnen" (1932), in: the same, *Aufsätze und Vorträge 1931–1980*, Braunschweig/Wiesbaden 1981, 35–38: 36.
2 In addition to the execution in wood, a version in tubular steel was produced–as Model A–which after 1939, was praised as being the "Siesta Medizinal, the new relaxation device, the most complete rest" in the Gebrüder Thonet, Frankenberg, advertising leaflet.
3 Cf. Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command–A Contribution to Anonymous History*, New York, 1948.
4 Fridtjof Schliephacke, "Erinnerung an Hans Luckhardt – Erfinder, Konstrukteur, Architekt," in: Exhib. Cat. Berlin 1990: *Brüder Luckhardt und Alfons Anker*, 98–112: 106.

Freischwinger Nr. 1810 Cantilever Chair No. 1810
Entwurf: Hana Kučerová-Záveská, Prag, um ca. 1935
Ausführung Execution: Hynek Gottwald Akc. Spol., Prag Prague, um ca. 1935;
Stahlrohr, Buche, Sperrholz Tubular steel, beech, plywood; Löffler Collection

Tubular Steel Variations with Molded Plywood Seats

In his continuous work on new solutions for tubular steel chairs, Marcel Breuer tried, in the late 1920s, to exploit the elasticity and flexibility of the material and to further develop Mart Stam's concept of cantilever chairs into resilient cantilever chairs. From the point of view of the optimal use of materials, models emerged whose elastic constructions made upholstery obsolete, such as the B 34 cantilever armchair, which consisted of two interlocking bent tubular steel frames—one for the front legs and the armrests, and one for the seat and backrest. For the resilient effect of the furniture, however, only the supporting tubular steel loop was necessary, which, without functional limitations, could be equipped with other seat structures—for example, often with opulent upholstery, which was haptically more pleasant, but gave the slender tubular steel furniture a completely different character and rendered the efforts of the architectural avant-garde to achieve transparency and elegance virtually useless.[1] On the other hand, the use of two-dimensionally molded plywood panels seemed more appropriate for the intention of the chairs: As with the cantilever model No. 1810, which was designed by Hana Kučerová-Záveská and manufactured by Hynek Gottwald in the mid-1930s, the seat and backrest could be made from one single sheet of material without a large volume. The designer Konstantin Grcic also used such a plywood seating surface for his cantilever chair designed for the "Muji Manufactured by Thonet" collection in 2009.

1 Cf. Otakar Máčel, *2100 Metal Tubular Chairs: A typology*, Rotterdam 2006.

Freischwinger Cantilever Chair „MUJI"
Entwurf Design: Konstantin Grcic, München Munich, 2009
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Frankenberg für for MUJI, ab as of 2012; Stahlrohr, Sperrholz
Tubular steel, plywood; MAK H 3746/2013; Schenkung Donation Thonet Frankenberg

Formsperrholzstühle

Sessel Nr. 1311 Chair No. 1311
Entwurf Design: Bruno Weill, New York, 1951
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Industries, New York, um ca. 1955; Amerikanische Wildkirsche, massiv gebogen und schichtverleimt American wild cherry, solid bent and laminated; MAK H 3980/2019

Sessel Chair DCW (Dining Chair Wood)
Entwurf Design: Charles & Ray Eames, 1945
Ausführung Execution: Molded Plywood Division der of the Evans Products Company, Venice, California für for Herman Miller Furniture Company, Michigan, um ca. 1950; Schichtholz, gebogen, Sperrholz, Hartgummi Laminated wood, bent, plywood, rubber; Lippisches Landesmuseum, Detmold

Sessel Chair SE 42
Entwurf Design: Egon Eiermann, Karlsruhe, 1950
Ausführung Execution: Wilde + Spieth, Esslingen, um ca. 1960; Schichtholz, gebogen, Sperrholz, Hartgummi Laminated wood, bent, plywood, rubber; Lippisches Landesmuseum, Detmold

Sessel Chair 404
Entwurf Design: Stefan Diez, München Munich, 2007
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Frankenberg, um ca. 2012; Schichtholz, gebogen, Sperrholz Laminated wood, bent, plywood; MAK H 3742/2013; Schenkung Donation Thonet Frankenberg

Following the invasion of the German Wehrmacht in Austria, the Jewish-born Leopold Pilzer, majority owner of Thonet Mundus and owner of the international trademark rights, fled to the United States in 1938. There he acquired three existing furniture factories in Statesville (NC), York (PA), and Sheyboygan (WI), which were partially converted for the production of bentwood.[1] Under the management of Pilzer's stepson Bruno Weill, who also designed his own models, the American Thonet company began with the production of chairs made of laminated wood. The series "Bentply Collection," which was introduced in 1950, was very successful and included not only Bruno Weill's designs, but also those of Walter Gropius and Joe Atkinson. "In a short time the distinguished Thonet Bentply collection became the preferred source for the college, university and health care markets."[2] The models were based on the contemporary furniture designs of the architect and designer couple Charles and Ray Eames, but achieved the quality of these role models neither in formal nor in technological terms. After the great international breakthrough that the Eames' experienced with their organically shaped plywood furniture in the mid-1940s, the architect Egon Eiermann also approached these forms with his molded plywood chairs in around 1950 in Germany. In 2007, the designer Stefan Diez once again took on the theme of the ergonomically shaped seat for the Thonet model 404 made of molded plywood and laminated wood. The bent legs and two wooden rails for connecting the backrest converge in a so-called node under the CNC-molded seat.

1 Cf. Nina Stritzler, "Thonet: Modern Furniture since 1922," in: Exhib. Cat. Washington 1993: *Against The Grain*, 101–111: 106 f.
2 Thonet Industries, *Thonet an historical overview*, Folder ca. 1987.

Katalog *Ländlicher Stil der Gebrüder Thonet Vienna* von 1958 Catalog *Ländlicher Stil der Gebrüder Thonet Vienna* from 1958

Rural Furniture

Sessel Chair L 205/II
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet Vienna, um ca. 1960
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet Vienna, Friedberg, um ca. 1960; Buche, massiv Beech, solid; MAK H 3981/2019

After the collapse of the Danube Monarchy in 1918, Austria had to orient itself more strongly than before to the Alps, which accounted for well over half of the national territory of the newly founded republic. This was also reflected in the design of furniture. In the course of the construction of new buildings which were necessary for the growing tourism branch, people repeatedly reflected on the Alpine tradition of the parlor, which was, however, understood in a quite modern way by some contemporary architects such as Clemens Holzmeister, Franz Baumann, and Wilhelm Stigler. After the Second World War, such down-to-earth modernity could even be claimed for the national public image: At the 1958 World Fair in Brussels, Austria presented itself with a progressive-modern pavilion designed by the architect Karl Schwanzer, which is considered one of the key buildings of Austrian post-war architecture. The modernist interior of the Expo Pavilion, which included a cinema and a recording studio, was complemented by a restaurant, whose furnishings deliberately made reference to the rustic facilities of parlors in rural alpine inns and wine taverns—and thus resorted to the stereotype of a specifically Austrian "coziness"[1]. In around 1960, Gebrüder Thonet also incorporated sturdy, solid wood alpine furniture into their program in Austria. Under the title *Ländlicher Style* [Rural Style], the company launched a new product line, which included the L 205 model shown here.[2]

1 Cf. Sebastian Hackenschmidt, "Die Möbel aus Karls Schwanzers Pavillon der Weltausstellung in Brüssel 1958. Eine Spurensuche im Museum für angewandte Kunst in Wien," in: Ulrike Matzer / Stefan Oláh (eds.), *Karl Schwanzer – Spuren / Traces*, Basel 2019, 101–109.
2 Cf. Gebrüder Thonet Catalog No. W 608 "Ländlicher Stil," ca. 1960.

Wannenstuhl Bowl Chair 667
Entwurf Design: Edelhard „Eddi" Harlis, um ca. 1957
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Frankenberg, 1958–61;
Buche, massiv, Sperrholz Beech, solid, plywood; Thonet Frankenberg

Stuhl Chair 3100 „Ameise" "Ant"
Entwurf Design: Arne Jacobsen, Kopenhagen Copenhagen, 1952
Ausführung Execution: Fritz Hansen, Dänemark Denmark, 1967; Stahlrohr, Sperrholz, Metall, Hartgummi Tubular steel, plywood, metal, rubber;
MAK H 3096/1989; Schenkung Donation Doris Weigel

„Nextmaruni Chair"
Entwurf Design: SANAA, Japan, 2005
Ausführung Execution: Maruni, Japan, 2015; Sperrholz, Stahl Plywood, steel;
Privatsammlung Private Collection, Wien Vienna

Since the middle of the 19th century plywood has been used as a material for chair seats. Initially, the plywood boards were still built into a frame, later simply laid on bars. Even when it was possible to mold the seat and back from one single plywood board, the back still had to be mounted on a supporting substructure.[1] In the middle of the 20th century, chairs with plywood seats became modern again: Above all, due to improved glue quality, which allowed for correspondingly elastic plywood, it was then possible not to have to support the back any more, but to let the two-dimensionally molded "plywood shells" float freely on the substructure. The connection of the seat shells with the base was to be made as invisible as possible: In order not to have to bolt the steel legs of his models individually to the seat, the designer Arne Jacobsen developed special connectors in which the three or four tubular steel legs converged. Due to the low material thickness of the plywood seats, however, an additional small plywood panel on which the connecting elements could be screwed had to be glued to the underside. The contrast of the thin metal legs and the seemingly floating plywood shells created the aesthetic effect of these chairs. In contrast to Jacobsen's so-called "Ant" from 1952–or also the "rabbit-eared" chair from SANAA from the first decade of the 21st century–the corresponding models with a wooden base seem more conventional. In addition, the bolt heads remained clearly visible when the plywood shell–as in the 1957 Thonet model 667 from Edelhard "Eddi" Harlis–were bolted directly to the base.[2]

1 Cf. Thillmann, *Schichten*, Munich 2018. See also Christopher Wilk, *Plywood: A Material Story*, London 2017.
2 The model could also be equipped with–optionally chromed or color-lacquered–tubular steel legs.

Sessel Chair „Janson"
Entwurf Design: Carl Jacobs, England, um ca. 1950
Ausführung Execution: Kandya, London, um ca. 1950; Buche, Sperrholz
Beech, plywood; MAK H 2811/1985

Wannenstuhl Bowl Chair 661
Entwurf Design: Günther Eberle, Deutschland Germany, 1953
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Frankenberg, 1954–59; Buche, massiv,
Sperrholz Beech, solid, plywood; Thonet Frankenberg

In addition to chairs, in which the seat and the backrest consist of a single, two-dimensionally molded plywood sheet, in the late 1940s seating furniture emerged which used three-dimensionally shaped seating shells–like the "Jason" chair designed by Carl Jacobs for the British company Kandya in 1950 or the Model 661 designed for Thonet by Günther Eberle in 1953. It is characteristic of this furniture that they all have holes, gaps or other recesses in the bowl-like plywood shell, which is less a form-related aesthetic decision than a material technological necessity. Namely, without such recesses, a plywood sheet could not be bent or folded into a three-dimensional bowl form. Correspondingly, this did not always result in the most elegant constructions: In all these shells, there is an overlap on the side or in the middle of the seat and usually the bolting to the base remains visible on the top surface of the seat. The aesthetic problems of the three-dimensionally shaped seating shells were, at that time, best solved in America–however, this was achieved by using a different material: Next to Eero Saarinen, it were primarily Charles and Ray Eames who, at the beginning of the 1950s, developed self-supporting, organically three-dimensional molded shells made of fiberglass-reinforced polyester, which could be mounted firmly with rubber discs[1]–so-called shock mounts–onto the various base structures made of wood or steel, and who became pioneers in the development of plastic furniture.[2]

1 These rubber bumpers, which "decouple" the upper part of the chair from the base frame, can also be found in Thonet's bowl chairs and models from Arne Jacobsen. This was the only way to make it possible to support the plywood tub or bowl elastically in order to prevent rupturing when subjected to unilateral loading or punctual pressure.

2 Cf. John Neuhart / Marilyn Neuhart / Ray Eames, *Eames Design: The Work of the Office of Charles and Ray Eames*, London 1989, 139 ff.

Der Wille zum Klassiker

Wannensessel Bowl Chair 664
Entwurf Design: Edelhard „Eddi" Harlis, Düsseldorf, 1954
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Frankenberg, 1955–59; Buche, Sperrholz, Hartgummi Beech, plywood, rubber; Sammlung Collection Metzl

Wannensessel Bowl Chair ST 663
Entwurf Design: Edelhard „Eddi" Harlis, Düsseldorf, 1954
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Frankenberg, 1950er Jahre 1950s; Eisen, lackiert; Sperrholz; Hartgummi Iron, painted; plywood; rubber; Sammlung Collection Metzl

Wannensessel Bowl Chair S 774
Entwurf Design: Edelhard „Eddi" Harlis, Düsseldorf, 1954
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Frankenberg / Kegelmann Technik, 2012; Carbon, Edelstahl Carbon, stainless steel; MAK H 3895/2016; Schenkung Donation MAK ART SOCIETY (MARS)

The period-typical "bowl chair" developed by Edelhart "Eddi" Harlis for Thonet in 1954 was produced in various versions until the end of the 1950s: The numbers 663 refer to the three-legged variants, while 664 was used for the versions with four legs. The abbreviation ST designates the version with legs made of tubular steel and a P after this stands for a palisander-veneered seat bowl. In the mid-1990s, the ST 664 model became a classic at Thonet and was produced again until 2010. It was considered the "most consistent design in plywood technology in terms of form," even though the model was not a major commercial success at the time: "Perhaps the design was too extreme for the taste of the time or did not meet the expectations of Thonet customers."[1] On the occasion of the re-edition of this piece of furniture at the end of the 20th century, the model ST 664 was given the name "The Egg" due to the oval shape of the bowl. In cooperation with Kegelmann Technik, the costly S 774 "Carbon" limited edition of the supposed classic was created in 2012. In the so-called Resin Transfer Molding process, the original molded plywood seat bowl was made from a composite of plastic and carbon fabric encased in transparent epoxy resin, which gives the futuristic-looking piece of furniture an aesthetically pleasing "behind-glass look."

1 Cf. Sabine Epple, "Fortschritt mit Konstanten," in: Exhib. Cat. Leipzig 2014: *Sitzen – Liegen – Schaukeln*, 8–27: 13.

Der Freischwinger von Verner Panton

S-Stuhl S Chair 275
Entwurf Design: Verner Panton, Dänemark / Deutschland Denmark / Germany, 1956–65
Ausführung Execution: A. Sommer, Plüdershausen, für for Thonet Frankenberg,
um ca. 1967; Sperrholz Plywood; MAK H 3738/2013

„Panton Chair"
Entwurf Design: Verner Panton, Dänemark / Deutschland
Denmark / Germany, 1958–67
Ausführung Execution: Herman Miller Collection Vitra, Deutschland Germany,
um ca. 1975; Polystrol Polystyrene; MAK H 2804/1985

Freischwinger Cantilever Chair „Cado 290"
Entwurf Design: Steen Østergaard, Kopenhagen Copenhagen, 1966
Ausführung Execution: Poul Cadovius, Dänemark Denmark, 1970; Glasfaserverstärktes Polyamid Fiberglass reinforced polyamide; MAK H 3801/2014

Sessel Chair „Casalino"
Entwurf Design: Alexander Begge, Deutschland Germany, 1971
Ausführung Execution: Casala, Lauenau, um ca. 1972; Leguval; Privatsammlung Private Collection, Wien Vienna

In 1965, after long and laborious experiments with various materials, Verner Panton, in collaboration with the company August Sommer, was able to produce his S chair, which had been designed in the mid-1950s, using molded plywood: As the first cantilever chair made from one single piece of material, it was included in Thonet's product range in two slightly different variants (models 275 and 276), but was produced only in small numbers due to its complex fabrication process and high costs.

In 1967, Panton finally succeeded in developing a plastic cantilever chair to production maturity. The Danish designer had to adapt his design time and again to the then still very limited material-technological possibilities, before the Panton chair could go down in history as a design icon of the 20th century.[1] In the meantime, however, Steen Østergaard had already succeeded in realizing a plastic cantilever chair with his "Cado 290" from 1966. The designs by the two Danish designers were to be influential for many more plastic chairs which were produced around 1970, as is made clear with the cantilever chair which Alexander Begge produced for the company Casala in 1971.[2]

1 Cf. Mathias Remmele, "Aus einem Guss: Die Geschichte des Panton-Stuhls," in: Exhib. Cat. Weil am Rhein 2000: *Verner Panton*, 74–99.
2 Cf. Exhib. Cat. Vienna 2006: *Frei Schwingen*.

Synthetic plastics have shaped the product designs of the industrial nations possibly more than any other material since the end of the Second World War. The "plastification" of the Western world–as Roland Barthes described it in an essay in the mid-fifties[1]–was reflected in almost all areas of everyday life and also opened up undreamt-of possibilities for furniture design. After the worldwide success of fiberglass-reinforced synthetic resin seat-shells in the 1950s and the first mass-produced one-piece plastic chairs–the first monoblocs–in the 1960s, the Thonet company joined the trend in the 1970s: In around 1973, the designer Gerd Lange designed the first plastic furniture for the company, the "Flex" chair, which remained in the product program until the 1990s. This hybrid piece of furniture–also the rare example of a Thonet stacking and row chair–was based on a molded plastic shell produced by OWI, which formed the seat and backrest. Only the wooden legs were reminiscent of the classic material of the Thonet chairs, even if they were not bent and were also adapted in their proportions to the contemporary taste of the 1970s.[2] Compared to Lang's hybrid furniture, the armchair made at the same time by the architect and designer Gae Aulenti seems formally more balanced, but the high sales figures of the "Flex" confirm that with this model Thonet had its finger on the pulse of the plastic age.

1 Roland Barthes, "Plastic," in: the same, *Mythologies* (1957), 1972.
2 See also Sabine Epple, "Fortschritt mit Konstanten," in: Exhib. Cat. Leipzig 2014: *Sitzen – Liegen – Schaukeln. Möbel von Thonet*, 8–27: 19 f.

Sessel Modell 4794 Chair Model 4794
Entwurf Design: Gae Aulenti, Italien Italy, 1972
Ausführung Execution: Kartell, Italien Italy, 1974;
Polyurethan Polyurethane; MAK H 3357/2005

Schaukelstuhl Rocking Chair „Low Rocker“
Entwurf Design: Steven Rieman, Yucca Valley, 1975
Ausführung Execution: Steven Rieman Design, USA, 1975; Eiche, massiv und schichtverleimt, Geflecht Oak, solid and laminated, cane; MAK H 3412/2008; Schenkung des Künstlers Donation from the artist

Ground-Level Sitting

Schaukelstuhl Rocking Chair „Low Rocker"
Entwurf Design: Steven Rieman, Yucca Valley, 1975
Ausführung Execution: Steven Rieman Design, USA, 1975; Mahagoni, Okoumé, massiv und schichtverleimt Mahogany, okoumé, solid and laminated; MAK H 3900/2016; Schenkung des Künstlers Donation from the artist

With his self-made bentwood rocking furniture, presented at the *California Design '76* exhibition at the Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles, the artist Steven Rieman moved between the American Furniture Studio movement and the countercultural design approaches in and after 1968.[1] In the seating landscapes of the 1960s and early 1970s, many artists and designers were increasingly concerned with a socio-critical survey of traditional concepts of life and familiar design approaches—and above all, it was a matter of achieving greater flexibility in the furnishing and use of living spaces. Here an informal, spontaneous and playful way of life was to become possible, a way which could lead to "ground-level living" and demonstrated an "attitude" completely free of the conventions of the conservative petty-bourgeoisie. Many of the flexible, colorful, and playful seating objects of the time, especially the extravagant plastic and foam furniture for indoor and outdoor use, were made for ground-level sitting which was almost like lying. Similar to the chair made of fiberglass reinforced plastic designed by Zublena in 1970, Rieman's "Low Rocker" made it possible to combine this new seat feeling with the traditional rocking chair.

1 Exhib. Cat. Los Angeles 1976: *California Design '76*.

Liege Lounger „Eurolax R1"
Entwurf Design: Charles Zublena, Frankreich France, 1964
Ausführung Execution: Les Plastiques de Bourgogne, Frankreich France, bis until 1983; Fiberglas Fiberglass; Privatsammlung Private Collection

Skulptur Sculpture „Schuhsessel“
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution:
Birgit Jürgenssen, Österreich Austria, 1974;
Holz, Leder Wood, leather; MAK GK 17/1988

Gender Constructions

Sesselgarderobe Chair Coatrack „Herrendiener“ Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: Uta Belina Waeger, Dornbirn, 2016–19; Holz, Metall, Textil, Leim, Lack Wood, metal, glue, paint; Besitz der Künstlerin Property of the artist

In her 1974 sculpture "*Schuhsessel*" the artist Birgit Jürgenssen transformed a simple bentwood chair into an oversized high heeled shoe.[1] A functioning, familiar everyday object thus becomes a hermaphrodite, almost surreal-looking object with no tangible practical value, which, however, displays its libidinal economy all the more clearly: The cliché of the shoe as a fetish object as well as the decoration of the–of course absent–body with certain accessories. In this way, the feminine-styled stiletto shoe provokes not only erotic fantasies, but also questions of gender identity and the construction of femininity.[2] With her "*Herrendiener,*" the artist Uta Belina Waeger juxtaposed Jürgenssens's object with a "male" pendant, referring to the so-called "mute servant"–a traditional type of furniture, made especially for storing men's clothing.

1 Since the art object is completely covered with leather, the underlying chair cannot be determined with certainty; but probably it is one of the two Thonet models, No. 681/2 or No. A 500/1 from German-language catalogs of the early 1930s: Both have rectangular profiles, the angles between the front and rear legs may have been removed by Birgit Jürgenssen.

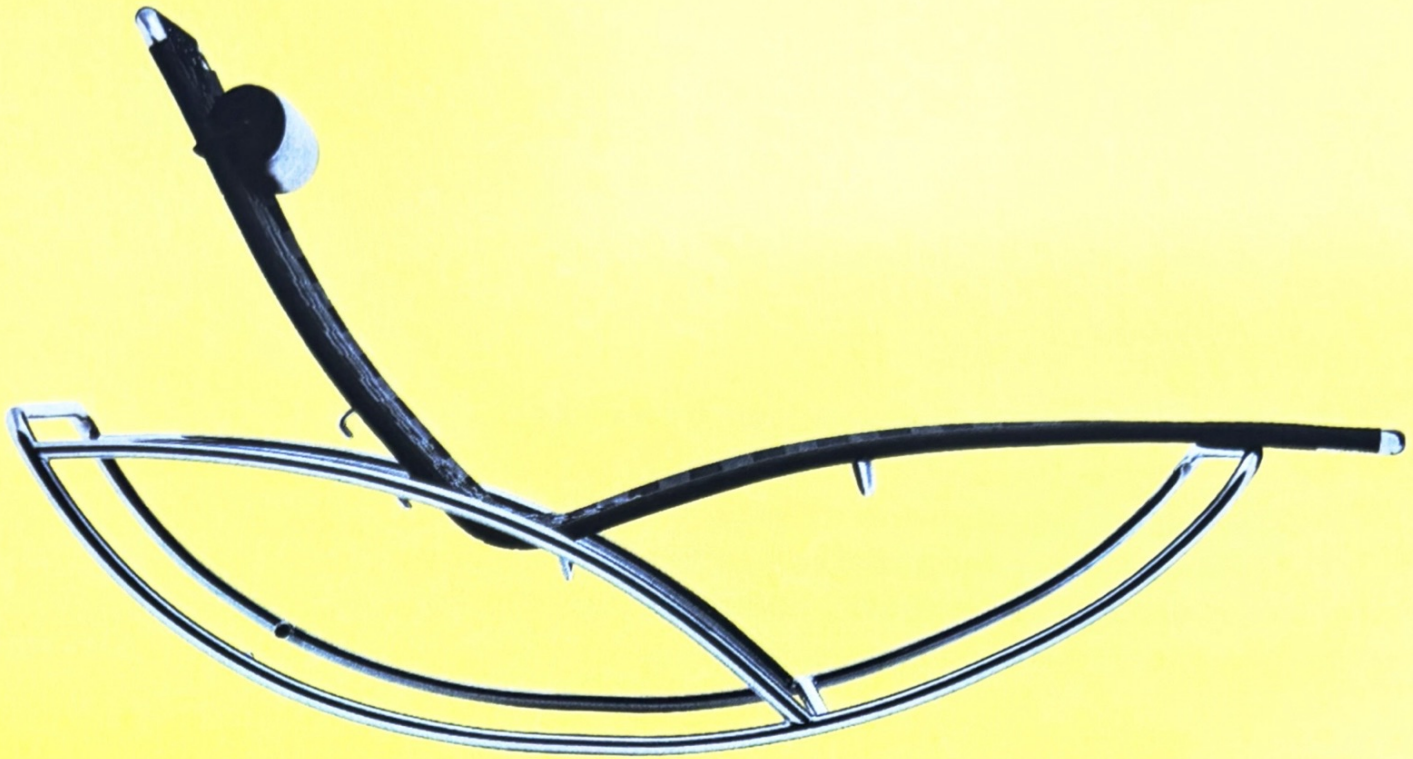
2 See also Exhib. Cat. Leipzig/Bielefeld 2013: *Starker Auftritt!*

Sessel Nr. A 500/1 und A 681/2 aus den Thonet-Katalogen von 1931 bzw. 1932 Chair Nos. A 500/1 and A 681/2 from the Thonet catalogs 1931 and 1932

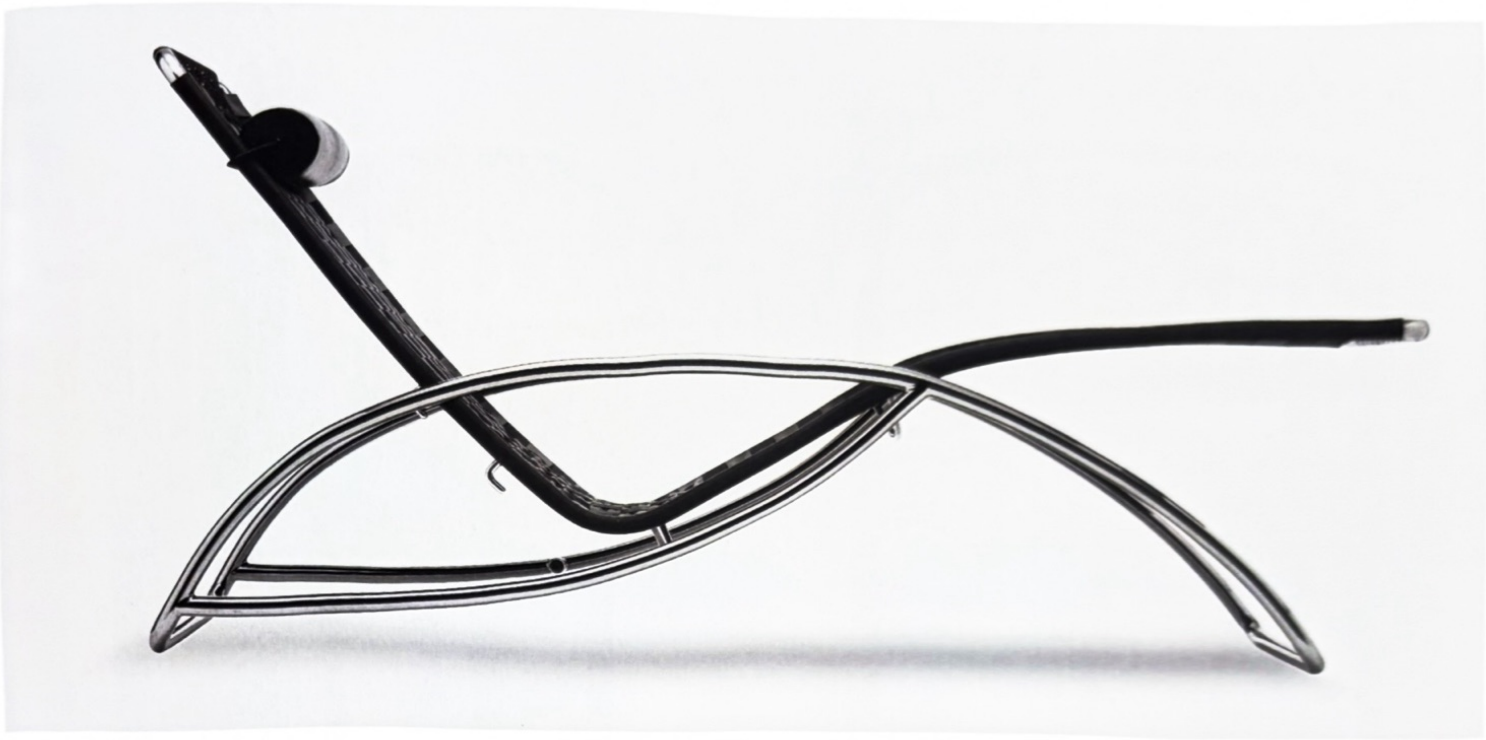
The term redesign refers to the transformation and restyling of existing design objects and is mainly associated with the architect and designer Alessandro Mendini, who in the late 1970s redesigned furniture classics–including Marcel Breuer's tubular steel armchair "Wassily," Giò Ponti's chair "Supperleggera," and the Thonet model No. 14–by adding colors, patterns, and shapes.[1] Only a short time later, the artist Bruno Gironcoli also redesigned a bentwood chair: In the mid-1980s, he equipped the bentwood chair No. 41 from the D. G. Fischel and sons company, which was produced in around 1890, with a sculptural attachment made of brass, which serves as a seat with armrests, and an iron reinforcement of the legs. In a similar way, the Austrian designer group March Gut developed a so-called add-on, which allows a found classic Thonet chair to be given a practical redesigning. The add-on, which was developed in 2013, consists of a black, yellow or white lacquered steel bracket, which can be hung on the backrest and clamped under the seat–thus providing the chair with armrests. The characteristic bending radii of the tubular steel contrast with the shapes of the bentwood furniture, but can also give a whole group of differing chairs a uniform appearance.

1 See also Daniel Klapsing, *Forschung durch Redesign*, Tübingen/Berlin 2017.

„Marina's Desire" (verstellbare Armlehne mit Thonet-Sessel Nr. 14)
(adjustable armrest with Thonet Chair No. 14)
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: March Gut, Linz, 2013
Sessel Nr. 14 Chair No. 14 von from Gebrüder Thonet, Wien Vienna, 1859 (Ausführung um 1885 Execution ca. 1885); Buche, massiv gebogen, Stahlrohr Beech, solid bent, tubular steel;
Besitz der Designer Property of the designers



Die Liege S 828 von Torben Skov als Schaukelmöbel
The Lounger S 828 by Torben Skov as a Rocking Lounger



Bürofauteuil Nr. 721 Office Armchair No. 721
Entwurf Design: J. & J. Kohn, 1903
Ausführung Execution: J. & J. Kohn, um ca. 1906; Buche, massiv gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid bent, plywood; Sammlung Collection Piva

Fauteuil Nr. 701/2 F Armchair No. 701/2 F
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: J. & J. Kohn, um ca. 1910; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid and bent, plywood; MAK WI 881/1911

To this day, Vienna's cultural achievements in the time around 1900 are a source of inspiration for homages, paraphrases, and new interpretations: Viennese Modernism with its famous protagonists—in the field of architecture and design, above all Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos, and Josef Hoffmann—stands for a time when Vienna was the center of far-reaching cultural, scientific, and socio-political developments and in which, last but not least, arts and crafts in the environment of the Wiener Werkstätte played a pioneering role. Especially in Post-Modernism there was an intensified examination of the cultural heritage of the turn of the century. A piece of furniture designed by the architect Adolf Krischanitz in the mid-1980s in the course of the renovation of the Vienna Secession building by Joseph Maria Olbrich, alluding to the context of Vienna around 1900, is shown here as a characteristic example: From the recombination of "role models" associated with Wagner and Hoffmann, a "post-modern" piece of bentwood furniture was created, which at the same time proved to be a practical piece of functional furniture—it is still in use in the presidential room of the Secession.[1]

1 Cf. Sebastian Hackenschmidt, "Zwischen den Stühlen. Zu den Möbeln von Adolf Krischanitz," in: Edelbert Köb (ed.), *Adolf Krischanitz*, Vienna 2016, 51–90: 68 ff.

Armlehnsessel Nr. m04 Armchair No. m04, „S1“
Entwurf Design: Adolf Krischanitz, Wien Vienna, 1986
Ausführung Execution: Wiesner-Hager, Österreich Austria, 1986; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid and bent, plywood; MAK H 3940/2018; Schenkung Donation Adolf Krischanitz

Sessel Nr. 16 Chair No. 16
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1861
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, um ca. 1880; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane; MAK H 2181/1969; Schenkung Bundeskammer der gewerblichen Wirtschaft Donation Federal Chamber of Commerce

Sessel Nr. 322 Chair No. 322 aus dem Speisesaal des Sanatorium Purkersdorf bei Wien from the dining room of the Sanatorium Purkersdorf near Vienna
Entwurf Design: Josef Hoffmann, Wien Vienna, 1904
Ausführung Execution: J. & J. Kohn, 1904; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz, Wachsleinwandbezug Beech, solid and bent, plywood, oilcloth cover; MAK H 2189-1/1969; Schenkung Bundeskammer der gewerblichen Wirtschaft Donation Federal Chamber of Commerce

Sessel Nr. 10-4100 Chair No. 10-4100
Entwurf Design: Ernst Beranek, Wien Vienna, 1989
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet Vienna, Friedberg, 1989; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz, Messing Beech, solid and bent, plywood, brass; MAK H 3997/2019; Schenkung Donation Sophie Scherrer

Hermann Czechs Armlehnsessel für das MAK-Café

Armlehnsessel für das MAK-Café in Wien Armchair for the MAK Café in Vienna
Entwurf Design: Hermann Czech, Wien Vienna, 1993
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet Vienna, Friedberg, 1993;
Buche, massiv gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid bent, plywood;
MAK H 4005/2019

Armlehnsessel Armchair „Lusch“
Entwurf Design: Luigi Colani, Deutschland Germany, 1969
Ausführung Execution: Lusch GmbH, Bielefeld, 1969; Fiberglas,
lackiert Fiberglass, painted; Privatsammlung Private Collection

Fauteuil Nr. 1011 Armchair No. 1011
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1903
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1910;
Buche, massiv gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid bent, plywood;
Sammlung Collection Heimo Keindl

Fauteuil Nr. 1010 Armchair No. 1010
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1903
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Bistritz Bystřice, um ca. 1910;
Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid and bent, plywood;
MAK H 2640/1982; Schenkung Donation Schifferer

As with Adolf Loos' chair design for the Café Museum from 1898, Hermann Czech's white lacquered furniture for the MAK Café in Vienna, which was executed by Thonet Vienna in 1993, could be called sampling: While Czech's simple chair without armrests was based principally on the simplicity of Thonet classics such as No. 14 or No. 56, lesser known models such as No. A 851/1 or No. A 383 from the 1930s[1] were also likely to be among the concrete role models for the armchair: unpretentious and sturdy chairs, like those which are still to be found today in many dining rooms, but a bit lighter, slimmer and livelier in Czech's version.[2] The armchair, on the other hand, though it is based on the same simple type, is almost mannerist in appearance due to the sweeping swing of the armrest and the therewith connected variation of the front legs. Although the models No. 1010 and No. 1011, produced from 1903 onwards, seem plausible as a direct template,[3] the armrest running like the ring around a planet around the back of the chair reminds one of the "floating armrest" of Luigi Colani's plastic chair produced by Lusch starting in the early 1970s.[4]

1 Cf. Gebrüder Thonet AG Frankenberg sales catalog No. 31 (June 1931).
2 The visual lightness also results from the fact that the lower part of the legs of the otherwise white lacquered piece of bentwood furniture was left so that the wood could be seen.
3 Cf. *ZA* No. 3 from 24 October 1903, 3 and 4, first offered in the Gebrüder Thonet sales catalog from 1904, 47.
4 Cf. Exhib. Cat. Ingolstadt, 2002: *Experiment 70. Designvisionen von Luigi Colani und Günter Beltzig*, 107.

Armlehnsessel Armchair „Spitting Image"
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: Rolf Sachs, Deutschland Germany, 2008
Urethanharz, gegossen Urethane resin, molded; MAK H 4004/2019; Schenkung Donation Rolf Sachs

Schattenobjekt Shadow Object „Hermann Czech"
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: Markus Wilfling, Österreich Austria, 2007;
Buche, massiv und gebogen, Lack Beech, solid and bent, paint; MAK GK 564/2007

Material Imitation

Sessel Chair
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: unbekannt unknown, um ca. 1990; Stahlrohr, Blech Tubular steel, sheet metal;
MAK H 3984/2019

In 1964 Gillis Lundgren designed a bentwood chair for IKEA that could barely conceal its similarity to the Thonet model No. 18. In 1983, however, the Swedish company came up with something original when it had the idea of producing the model, christened "Ögla" in plastic. As in the case of the iron garden chairs from the second half of the 19th century, which reproduced the shape of various Thonet models, here the characteristic design language of the bentwood chairs, which had evolved from the specific properties of the material, was reproduced in a completely different material. But while the bent iron bars of the garden chairs have a formal similarity to bentwood rods, plastics have the ability to take on almost any shape. Given these virtually unlimited possibilities, there is no real reason to copy bentwood chairs, with their individual parts screwed together, in plastic. Especially models cast out of one material in a mold, such as the famous Monoblocs, can be made much easier, cheaper, and more efficiently from plastic.[1] On the other hand, there seems to be a market for such material imitations: Not only is the "Ögla" chair[2] still available at IKEA, but in recent decades, metal garden furniture has again and again been inspired by the bentwood shapes of the Thonet chairs—and thereby even the characteristic Viennese cane has been modeled in sheet metal.

1 Gerda Breuer, *Die Erfindung des moderne Klassikers. Avantgarde und ewige Aktualität*, Ostfildern-Ruit, 2001, 73.
2 Since the 2010s, "Ögla"—following the ecological *zeitgeist*—has been produced from a wood-plastic composite (WPC).

<
Sessel Chair „Ögla" (nach Thonet Nr. 18 after Thonet No. 18)
Entwurf Design: Gillis Lundgren, Schweden Sweden, 1964
Ausführung Execution: IKEA, Schweden Sweden, um ca. 1990;
Kunststoff Plastic; MAK H 3983/2019

Sessel Chair „Dorotea"
Entwurf Design: Erik Wørts, Schweden Sweden, um ca. 1965
Ausführung Execution: IKEA, Schweden Sweden, um ca. 1990;
Kunststoff Plastic; MAK H 3982/2019

„converted01" (Thonet-Sessel Nr. 14 Thonet Chair No. 14)
Konzept und Ausführung Design and execution: :mentalKLINIK, Istanbul, 2007; Buche, Geflecht Beech, cane;
MAK H 3754/2013, Schenkung der Künstler*innen Donation by the artists

<
Sessel Nr. 14 Chair No. 14
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, Wien Vienna, 1859
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, um ca. 1922; Buche, massiv gebogen, Eisen Beech, solid bent, iron;
MAK H 2763/1984; Schenkung Donation Stefan und and Paul Asenbaum

In order to illustrate the convincingly simple construction of chair model No. 14—undoubtedly the most well-known piece of Thonet furniture and one of the first classics of modern industrial design[1]—many museums have clearly arranged the components of a specimen on a display board: "Chair No. 14, the end of a long series of experiments, consists of no more than six parts: Crest rail with rear legs, splat, seat ring, leg ring, and both front legs."[2] Made from beech wood, these mass-produced components have been shipped all over the world and assembled at the destination into a complete chair using ten screws. In a very different way—through constructive deconstruction—the artist group:mentalKLINIK turned the Thonet classic into a wall object in the mid-2000s: In the style of the "destruction art" of the 1960s,[3] the chair was radically disassembled, so that it is hardly recognizable as a piece of furniture—and cannot immediately be put together into a functional object again. Not only the familiar "picture" of a piece of furniture was taken apart, but also the obvious notion that we have of design in the sense of product development. The assumption that the meaning of an object is exhausted in the shaping and application as a commodity is thus called into question.

1 Cf. Andrea Gleiniger, *Der Kaffeehausstuhl Nr. 14 von Michael Thonet*, Frankfurt am Main 1998.
2 Karl Mang, *Thonet Bugholzmöbel*, Vienna 1982, 48. The seat ring was of course covered with cane.
3 Cf. Justin Hoffmann, *Destruktionskunst*, Munich 1995.

Reduktion

„Ply Chair"
Entwurf Design: Jasper Morrison, London, 1989
Ausführung Execution: Vitra, Deutschland Germany, 1992; Birkensperrholz Birch plywood; MAK H 3164-1/1992

<

Sessel „MUJI Nr. 14" Chair "MUJI No. 14"
Entwurf Design: James Irvine, London, 2007/08
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Frankenberg für for MUJI, 2012; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid and bent, plywood; MAK H 3605/2012; Schenkung Donation Thonet Frankenberg

Sessel Nr. m99 Chair No. m99
Entwurf Design: Adolf Krischanitz, Wien Vienna, 2016
Ausführung Execution: Braun Lockenhaus, Österreich Austria, 2016; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid and bent, plywood; MAK H 3999/2019; Schenkung Donation Braun Lockenhaus GmbH

For the "Muji manufactured by Thonet" collection, created in 2009, the designer James Irvine—who also served as artistic director of Thonet until shortly before his death in 2013—designed a kind of minimal version of the Thonet model No. 14. As a redesign of this furniture classic, the model Muji No. 14 from the Japanese lifestyle chain is neither slimmer nor daintier or lighter—but still somehow looks slightly reduced: Irvine dispensed with the leg ring and replaced the inner splat with a horizontally mounted, narrow and slightly molded plywood board whose height corresponds approximately to that of the chair frame and the frame of the matching table. If you place the chair in front of the table, the back's plywood board appears to dissolve into the table frame. The design of the simple chair, which architect Adolf Krischanitz added in 2016 to his "Bentwood" series, which has been produced by the Austrian company Braun Lockenhaus since 2012, also operates with a formal reduction. In addition to variants where the back is filled with a plywood sheet there is also this version, which manages to do without a back motif. An example of this reductionist tendency could well have been Jasper Morrison's "Ply-Chair" designed in the late 1980s: "Towards the end of the 1980s a new spirit of functionalism and simplicity was perceived in the design of furniture, and one of the chief protagonists was Jasper Morrison. This plywood chair embodies Morrison's approach. It is reduced to a very simple shape, merely a seat, four legs and the outline of the back, made from humble undecorated plywood. In a sense it can be compared to a sketch of a chair, since it appears to comprise only the most essential and primary elements needed to construct one. But a closer look reveals that it is a far from simplistic design. While the front legs and seat appear to be geometric and right-angled, the shape of the chair back and rear legs are fluid, like a freehand drawing, or the profile of a stringed instrument like a guitar or violin. The controlled curvaceousness of this part of the chair adds sensuousness to what could otherwise be an overly simplistic design."[1]

1 https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O72604/ply-chair-chair-morrison-jasper/ (last update August 2019).

James Irvine, Tisch und Sessel für „Muji manufactured by Thonet", 2009
James Irvine, Table and Chair for "Muji manufactured by Thonet," 2009

Super Normal

Armlehnsessel Nr. 196 Armchair No. 196
Entwurf Design: Finn Juhl, Dänemark Denmark, 1961
Ausführung Execution: France + Søn AS., Deutschland Germany, 1962;
Teak, Kunstleder, gepolstert Teak, imitation leather, upholstered;
MAK H 2119/1968

Armlehnsessel Armchair 130 F
Entwurf Design: Naoto Fukasawa, Japan, 2009
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Frankenberg, 2012; Eiche, massiv, Sperrholz
Solid oak, plywood; MAK H 3741/2013; Schenkung Donation Thonet Frankenberg

Super Normal

„Basel Chair"
Entwurf Design: Jasper Morrison, London, 2008
Ausführung Execution: Vitra, Deutschland Germany, 2019; Buche, ASA Kunststoff Beech, ASA plastic; MAK H 4003/2019; Schenkung Donation Vitra GmbH

Sessel Chair 118
Entwurf Design: Sebastian Herkner, Deutschland Germany, 2018
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Frankenberg, 2018; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid and bent, cane; Thonet Frankenberg

In 2010 Naoto Fukasawa designed a simple solid wood chair for Thonet, whose seat, backrest, and armrests are made of lacquered molded plywood. The Japanese designer, who is considered a representative of so-called minimal design, wanted to decidedly "create something [...] that is as iconic as the history of the company."[1] Astonishingly, the chair he designed reminds us more of Scandinavian furniture design of the 1950s and 1960s–for example the dignified seating furniture of the Danish Finn Juhl–than it does of traditional bentwood furniture. Fukasawa was thus able to refer to a design that in the post-war period had become the epitome of "good form" and was characterized by restrained design, pragmatic simplicity, and the unity of form and function. At the same time, with his chair design he took up on the concept of the "supernormal," which he had defined in 2007 together with the British designer Jasper Morrison: In the exhibition *Super Normal – Sensations of the Ordinary* the two designers had assembled everyday objects that were almost archetypal in their ordinariness and normality.[2] Due to their simplicity reduced to the necessary, Fukasawa's and Morrison's own designs sometimes appear as archetypes, which in the contemporary product landscape, of course, are well-designed objects. In this sense, the designer Sebastian Herkner recently designed a "supernormal" chair, called "Chair 118," for Thonet.

1 Naoto Fukasawa, cited after: Thonet GmbH (ed.), *Thonet Essence 01*, Frankenberg, no year, 89.
2 First, the exhibition was shown in the Axis Gallery, Tokyo, before it travelled around the world. Cf. Jasper Morrison / Naoto Fukasawa, *Super Normal – Sensations of the Ordinary*, Zurich 2007.

Sessel Chair 107
Entwurf Design: Robert Stadler, Wien Vienna, 2011
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Frankenberg, um ca. 2012; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid and bent, plywood; MAK H 3740/2013; Schenkung Donation Thonet Frankenberg

Joseph Ulrich Danhauser, Entwurf für einen Sessel, Federzeichnung, laviert, Wien, 1820er Jahre Joseph Ulrich Danhauser, Design for a chair, pen and ink drawing, washed, Vienna, 1820s; MAK KI-8971-831

In 2011, the designer Robert Stadler created a simple but playful chair for Thonet GmbH, which is interesting mainly due to its backrest: On the one hand, the characteristic combination of the backrest and the rear legs is based on a special construction, which is found for the first time in the commercially extremely successful garden chair No. 4, which was offered starting from 1891. On the other hand, the attached, molded plywood board of the backrest invokes the formal character of the Thonet chairs No. 8 and No. 14. However, Stadler, who comes from Vienna, also clearly follows the tradition of the Viennese Biedermeier chairs, whose characteristic, semicircular shaped backrests are considered to be a possible source of inspiration for the two early Thonet classics.[1]

1 In particular, the model No. 18 of the Danhauser furniture factory anticipates the formal character of the so-called "consumer chair"—the Thonet model No. 14—almost prototypically; a corresponding design drawing by Joseph Ulrich Danhauser is in the MAK Collection. See also Christian Witt-Dörring, "Der differenzierte Konsum. Das Wiener Möbel 1815–1859," in: Exhib. Cat. Vienna 1988: *Bürgersinn und Aufbegehren*, 367–387 and 391–407: 391.

Sessel Chair
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: Joseph Ulrich Danhauser, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1830; Nuss, Buche, gepolstert Walnut, beech, upholstered; MAK H 1778-2/1942

Sessel Chair
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: unbekannt unknown, Wien Vienna, um ca. 1825; Mahagoni, Buche, gepolstert Mahogany, beech, upholstered; MAK SOB 56/1956; Nachlass Estate of Franz Sobek

Sessel Chair „Postmundus“
Entwurf Design: Martino Gamper, London, 2008
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Mundus, 2012; Buche, massiv und gebogen,
Sperrholz Beech, solid and bent, plywood; MAK H 3619/2012

Postmundus

During a visit in 2008 to the Croatian Mundus factory, where, among other things, the bentwood furniture for the English furniture store Conran is made, the designer Martino Gamper was inspired to create some unusual bentwood creations with the title "Postmundus." One of these furniture objects designed for the Conran Shop was launched again by the Milanese gallery Nilufar as a low volume series in 2012 and presented again at the Milan Furniture Fair. The designer used five bentwood pieces for his design, namely those which usually make up the No. 18 hairpin shaped back splat, but two of these pieces were also used as rear legs: As an homage to the classic Thonet chairs, Gamper's construction initially reminds one of the model No. 24, introduced in the late 1870s, which uses two of the bentwood components that were used for the "Postmundus" chair as a decorative motif in its backrest. However, the Technical Museum in Vienna owns a model–probably by J. & J. Kohn–from the 1890s, which is not included in the catalogs, and which has an even greater formal similarity to Gamper's design, because here too the use of a separate crest rail as a frame for the motif is omitted. This historic model is indeed structurally completely different: The two outer hairpins are an extension of the rear legs and only the middle hairpin is applied as a purely ornamental motif. It is this decorative element from which the similarity with Gamper's model results from.

Sessel Chair
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution:
J. & J. Kohn, um ca. 1890; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane;
Technisches Museum Wien Vienna

>
Sessel Nr. 24 Chair No. 24
Entwurf Design: Gebrüder Thonet, 1875
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet, Koritschan Koryčany, um ca. 1880; Buche, massiv gebogen, Geflecht Beech, solid bent, cane;
Sammlung Collection Werner

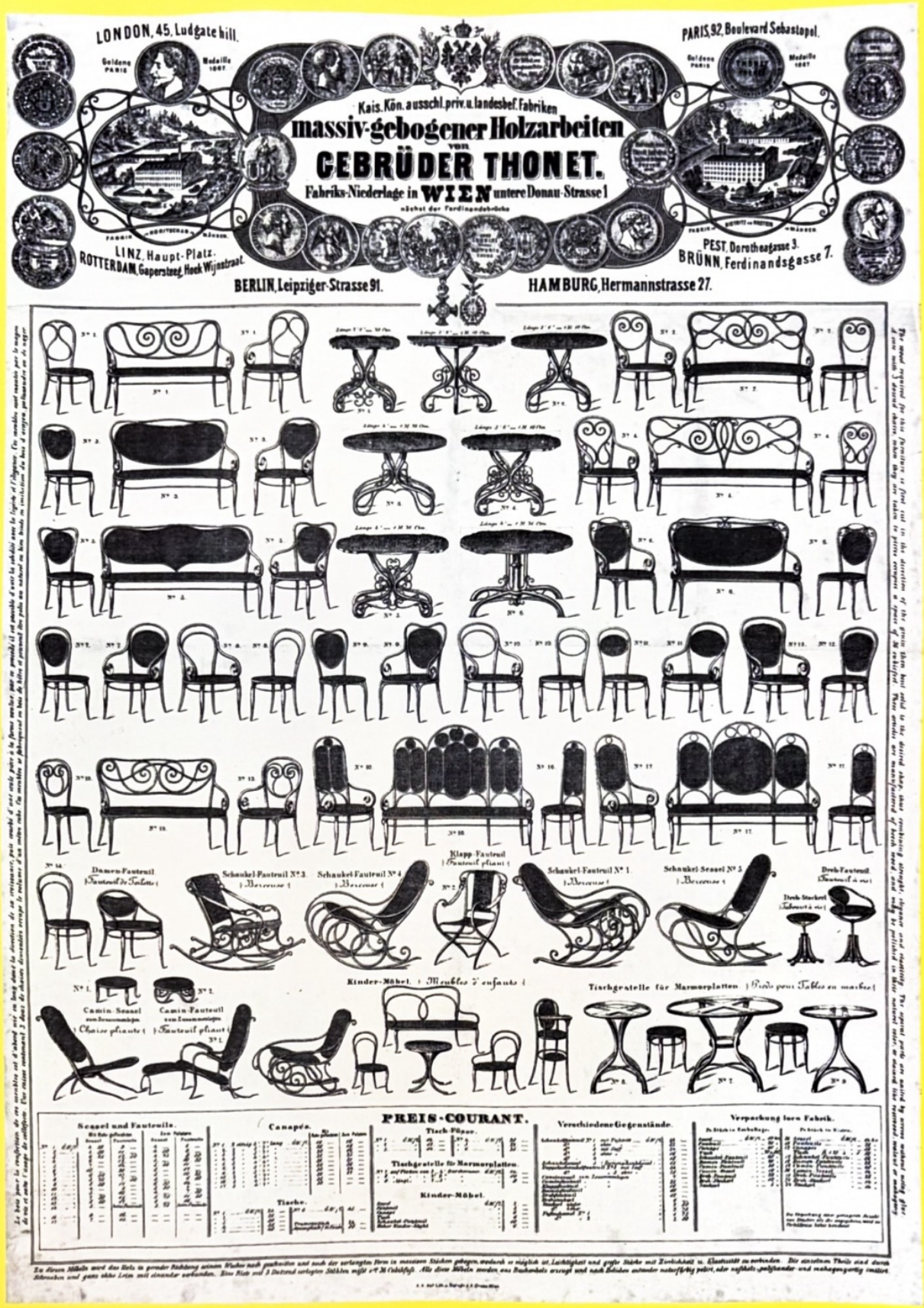
Love Me Bender

Mobile Bugholzküche Portable Bentwood Kitchen „Love me Bender"
Entwurf und Ausführung Design and execution: breadedEscalope, Wien Vienna 2011; Holz, Metall, Kunststoff, diverse Werkzeuge Wood, metal, plastic, diverse utensils; MAK DS 91/2014; Schenkung der Donation MAK ART SOCIETY (MARS)

„Kunsthalle Wien Chair“
Entwurf Design: Ineke Hans, Amsterdam/Wien Amsterdam/Vienna, 2017
Ausführung Execution: Gebrüder Thonet Vienna – Wiener Design, Turin 2017;
Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid and bent, plywood;
MAK H 3939/2018; Schenkung Donation Kunsthalle Wien

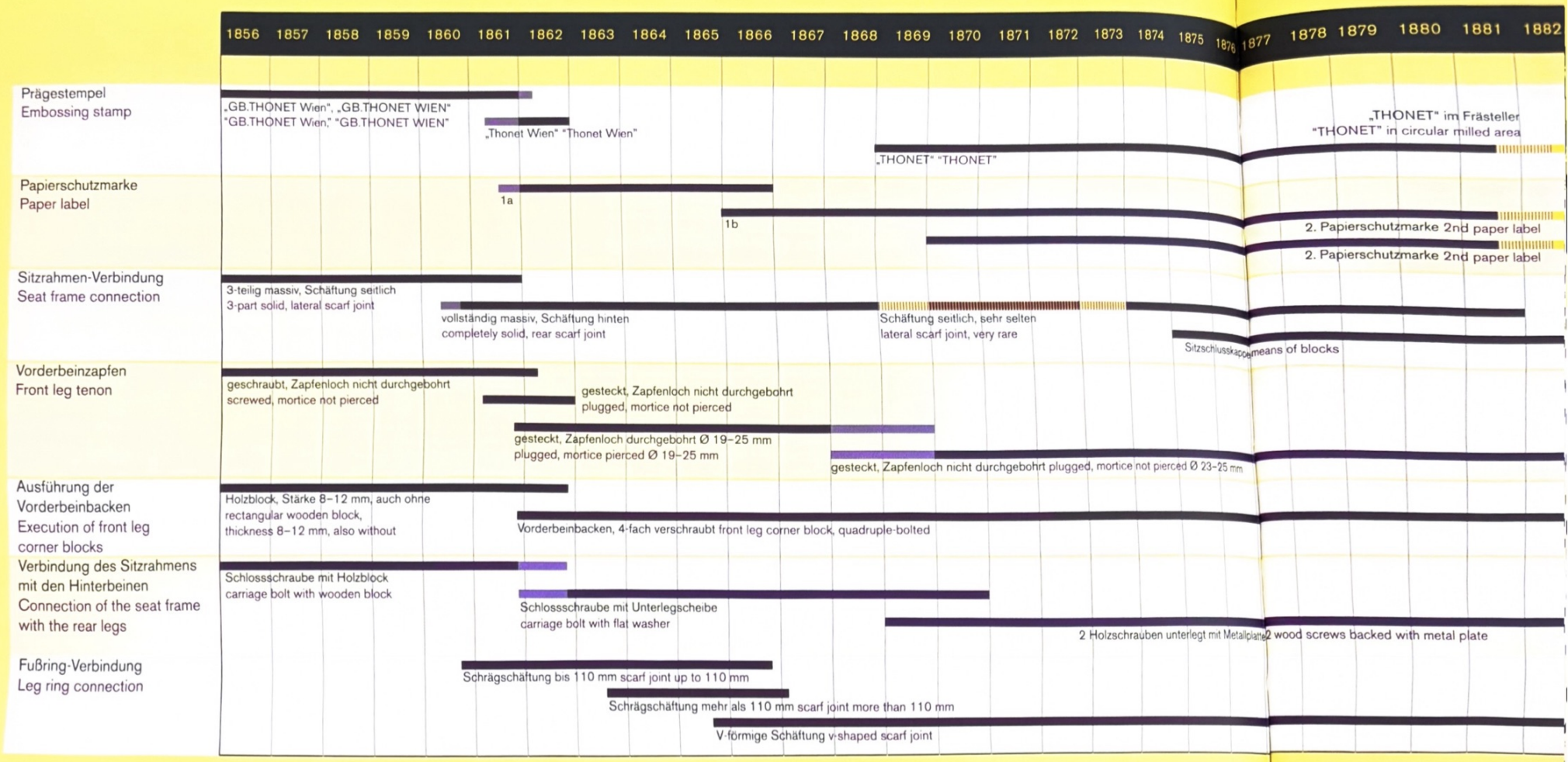
e course of her exhibition "*Was ist Loos*?" e Kunsthalle Wien in 2017, the artist Ineke s designed a new piece of bentwood fur- e, which was executed by Gebrüder et Vienna. The "Kunsthalle Wien Chair," h was specially designed to meet the s of the institution, is a stackable row chair se at conferences, lectures, and discus- events which plays on the tradition of the f-the-century Viennese bentwood archi- ral furniture from the likes of Adolf Loos, Wagner, and Josef Hoffmann. However, really wanted to name specific role mod- r this chair, then it would probably be best ke reference to the bentwood furniture interwar period—especially to the chairs German architect and designer Adolf av Schneck, who also oriented his de- on the rampant tubular steel fashion of 920s. Moreover, for the seat, the artist on the classic star-shaped perforated od panels from the repertoire of furniture facturers from the 19th century, which bandoned in the modern era and is found r in the turn-of-the-century architectural re nor in the chairs of the interwar period.

Fauteuil Armchair A 64 F
Entwurf Design: Adolf Gustav Schneck, Stuttgart, um ca. 1928
Ausführung Execution: Thonet Mundus, 1930er Jahre 1930s; Buche, massiv und gebogen, Sperrholz Beech, solid and bent, plywood; MAK H 2618/1981; Schenkung Donation Friederike Niedermoser



Verkaufsplakat der Gebrüder Thonet, 1867 Gebrüder Thonet sales poster, 1867

Modellreihe 1 / Einfachrahmen Model Series 1 / Simple Frames


1856 1857 1858 1859 1860 1861 1862 1863 1864 1865 1866 1867 1868 1869 1870 1871 1872 1873 1874 1875 1876 1877 1878 1879 1880 1881 1882
Prägestempel
Embossing stamp
„GB.THONET Wien", „GB.THONET WIEN"
"GB.THONET Wien," "GB.THONET WIEN"
„Thonet Wien" "Thonet Wien"
„THONET" "THONET"
„THONET" im Frästeller
"THONET" in circular milled area
Papierschutzmarke
Paper label
1a
1b
2. Papierschutzmarke 2nd paper label
2. Papierschutzmarke 2nd paper label
Sitzrahmen-Verbindung
Seat frame connection
3-teilig massiv, Schäftung seitlich
3-part solid, lateral scarf joint
vollständig massiv, Schäftung hinten
completely solid, rear scarf joint
Schäftung seitlich, sehr selten
lateral scarf joint, very rare
Sitzschlusskappe
means of blocks
Vorderbeinzapfen
Front leg tenon
geschraubt, Zapfenloch nicht durchgebohrt
screwed, mortice not pierced
gesteckt, Zapfenloch nicht durchgebohrt
plugged, mortice not pierced
gesteckt, Zapfenloch durchgebohrt Ø 19–25 mm
plugged, mortice pierced Ø 19–25 mm
gesteckt, Zapfenloch nicht durchgebohrt plugged, mortice not pierced Ø 23–25 mm
Ausführung der
Vorderbeinbacken
Execution of front leg
corner blocks
Holzblock, Stärke 8–12 mm, auch ohne
rectangular wooden block,
thickness 8–12 mm, also without
Vorderbeinbacken, 4-fach verschraubt front leg corner block, quadruple-bolted
Verbindung des Sitzrahmens
mit den Hinterbeinen
Connection of the seat frame
with the rear legs
Schlossschraube mit Holzblock
carriage bolt with wooden block
Schlossschraube mit Unterlegscheibe
carriage bolt with flat washer
2 Holzschrauben unterlegt mit Metallplatte
2 wood screws backed with metal plate
Fußring-Verbindung
Leg ring connection
Schrägschäftung bis 110 mm scarf joint up to 110 mm
Schrägschäftung mehr als 110 mm scarf joint more than 110 mm
V-förmige Schäftung v-shaped scarf joint

How Old Is My Thonet Chair?

With the help of the following tables, it is possible to make an exact chronological dating of all Thonet chairs manufactured between 1856 and 1882. A distinction between the model series 1–trapezoidal seat ring–and model series 14–circular seat ring–has been found to make sense in any case. The further differentiation within series 1 between chairs with a simple seat frame, as in the model numbers 1, 8, 10, and 11 and those with a profiled frame, like model numbers 2, 3, and 4, shows only slight differences, but seemed nevertheless advisable.

The time after 1882 is not taken into consideration. In 1882, the second paper label and a new "THONET" stamp were introduced. This new stamp was applied to a smooth area that was planed to the inside of the seat frame. The second label was used until about 1920, the diameter of the surface increased from 40 to 62 millimeters. As of 1887, for reasons of customs policy, "Austria" and/or a number were added to the "THONET" stamp.

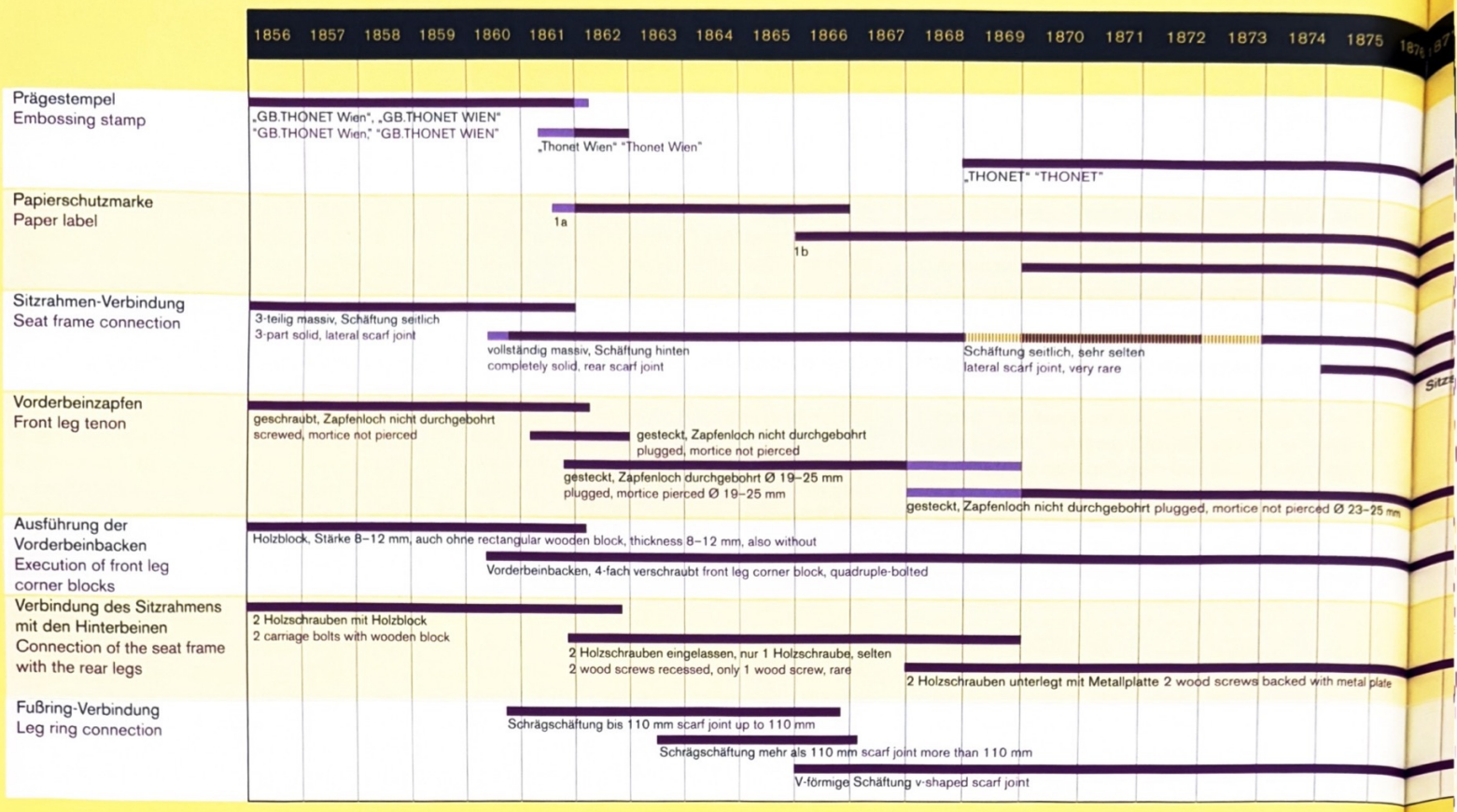
By far the largest number of chairs stored in the database dates from the mid-1840s to the 1880s.[1] Especially in this period, we find a variety of measures to improve stability, durability, and serviceability. If one takes into account the relevant information from the letters, observes the respective labels and markings, and puts all this in relation to each other, one can ultimately delimit the production period of each Thonet chair or armchair in a reliably chronological manner. After 1880, production was and also continued to much more standardized and further improvements were made to a lesser extent.

If one looks at the period of time represented by the tables as a whole, one can distinguish between clearly individual phases. A first "technological boost" was initiated with the patent of bending solid wood, which resulted in the construction of the factory in Koryčany. This mainly concerned the necessary new equipment, work processes, and work organization. A second phase can be found in the years from 1860 to 1862. Here the main goal was to introduce measures that concern improvements in the individual components with the aim of greater stability and thus serviceability. The "invention" of the leg ring was a decisive step. A significant role was played by the construction of the second factory in Bystřice, where the Thonets wanted to produce at the most advanced level right from the start. A third phase can be observed at the end of the 1860s. Improvements were made to the trapezoidal frames, which were built up on the corners to allow longer leg tenons for more stability and a new, firmer bolting of the back and seat frame was introduced; the circular seat frames were given patent screws. Finally, from 1875, there were two major innovations that again affected all chairs: The ends of the seat frame were joined no longer by overlapping but fastened by means of blocks and optionally available reinforcing braces stabilized the connection of the backrest to the frame.

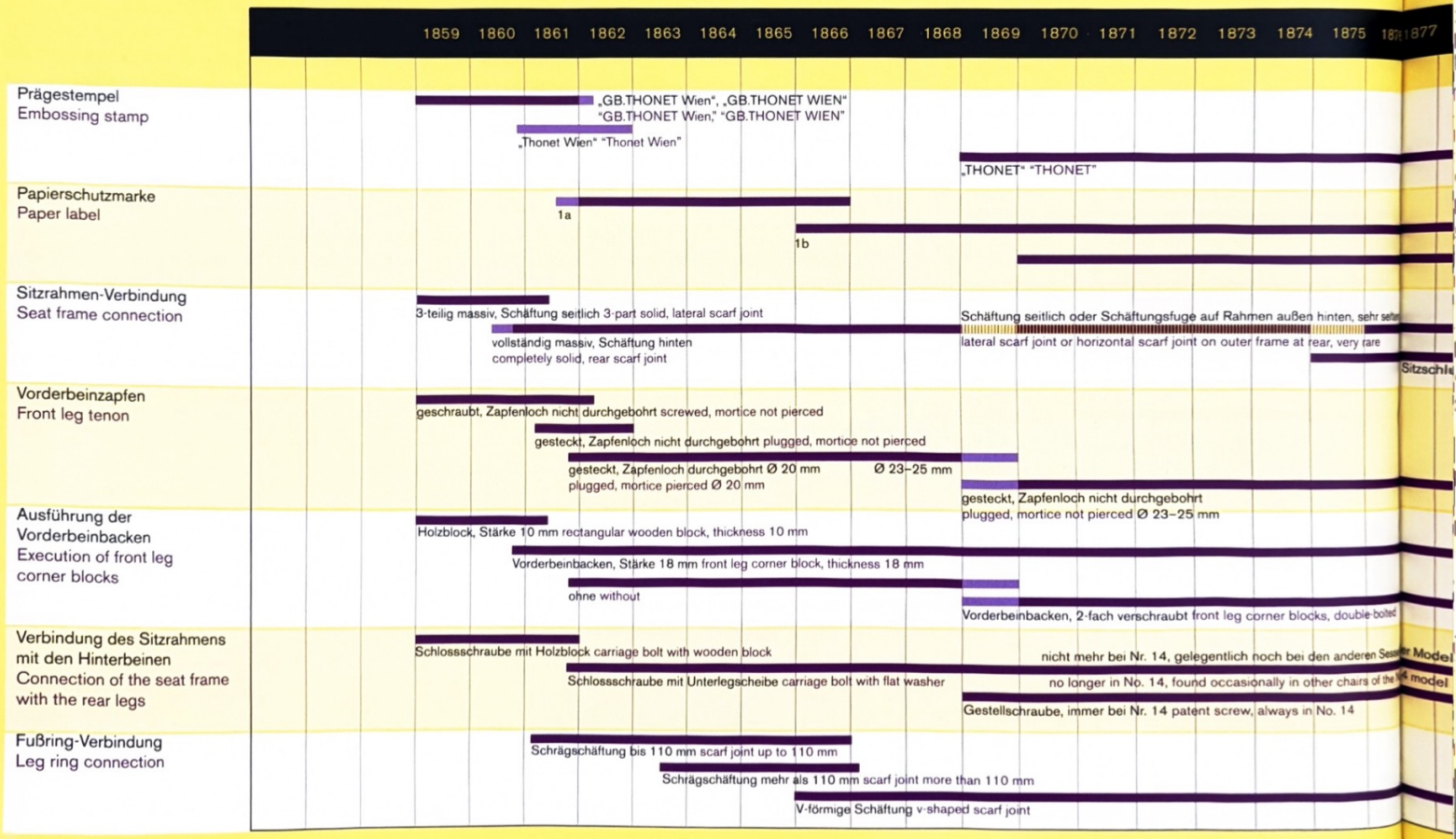
With reservations, the tables can also be used for dating the armchairs. However, it can be observed in the case of the armchairs that changes were always made a little later than in the chairs, so they were always made in the technically older version for a longer period of time.

1 The time period from 1830 to 1856 is only briefly dealt with here. A detailed description of the various bending processes before massive bending, their chronology, and the description of the markings and characteristics of the earliest Thonet chairs can be found in the article: W. Thillmann, "Experiment und Innovation 1830–1939," in: Exhib. Cat. Leipzig/Bielefeld 2014: *Sitzen – Liegen – Schaukeln*, 184–224.

Modellreihe 1 / Profilrahmen Model Series 1 / Profiled Frames


1856 1857 1858 1859 1860 1861 1862 1863 1864 1865 1866 1867 1868 1869 1870 1871 1872 1873 1874 1875
Prägestempel
Embossing stamp
„GB.THONET Wien", „GB.THONET WIEN"
"GB.THONET Wien," "GB.THONET WIEN"
„Thonet Wien" "Thonet Wien"
„THONET" "THONET"
Papierschutzmarke
Paper label
1a
1b
Sitzrahmen-Verbindung
Seat frame connection
3-teilig massiv, Schäftung seitlich
3-part solid, lateral scarf joint
vollständig massiv, Schäftung hinten
completely solid, rear scarf joint
Schäftung seitlich, sehr selten
lateral scarf joint, very rare
Vorderbeinzapfen
Front leg tenon
geschraubt, Zapfenloch nicht durchgebohrt
screwed, mortice not pierced
gesteckt, Zapfenloch nicht durchgebohrt
plugged, mortice not pierced
gesteckt, Zapfenloch durchgebohrt Ø 19–25 mm
plugged, mortice pierced Ø 19–25 mm
gesteckt, Zapfenloch nicht durchgebohrt plugged, mortice not pierced Ø 23–25 mm
Ausführung der Vorderbeinbacken
Execution of front leg corner blocks
Holzblock, Stärke 8–12 mm, auch ohne rectangular wooden block, thickness 8–12 mm, also without
Vorderbeinbacken, 4-fach verschraubt front leg corner block, quadruple-bolted
Verbindung des Sitzrahmens mit den Hinterbeinen
Connection of the seat frame with the rear legs
2 Holzschrauben mit Holzblock
2 carriage bolts with wooden block
2 Holzschrauben eingelassen, nur 1 Holzschraube, selten
2 wood screws recessed, only 1 wood screw, rare
2 Holzschrauben unterlegt mit Metallplatte 2 wood screws backed with metal plate
Fußring-Verbindung
Leg ring connection
Schrägschäftung bis 110 mm scarf joint up to 110 mm
Schrägschäftung mehr als 110 mm scarf joint more than 110 mm
V-förmige Schäftung v-shaped scarf joint

Modellreihe 14 Model Series 14 / Circular Frames


1859 1860 1861 1862 1863 1864 1865 1866 1867 1868 1869 1870 1871 1872 1873 1874 1875
Prägestempel
Embossing stamp
„GB.THONET Wien", „GB.THONET WIEN"
"GB.THONET Wien," "GB.THONET WIEN"
„Thonet Wien" "Thonet Wien"
„THONET" "THONET"
Papierschutzmarke
Paper label
1a
1b
Sitzrahmen-Verbindung
Seat frame connection
3-teilig massiv, Schäftung seitlich 3-part solid, lateral scarf joint
vollständig massiv, Schäftung hinten
completely solid, rear scarf joint
Schäftung seitlich oder Schäftungsfuge auf Rahmen außen hinten, sehr selten
lateral scarf joint or horizontal scarf joint on outer frame at rear, very rare
Vorderbeinzapfen
Front leg tenon
geschraubt, Zapfenloch nicht durchgebohrt screwed, mortice not pierced
gesteckt, Zapfenloch nicht durchgebohrt plugged, mortice not pierced
gesteckt, Zapfenloch durchgebohrt Ø 20 mm
plugged, mortice pierced Ø 20 mm
Ø 23–25 mm
gesteckt, Zapfenloch nicht durchgebohrt
plugged, mortice not pierced Ø 23–25 mm
Ausführung der Vorderbeinbacken
Execution of front leg corner blocks
Holzblock, Stärke 10 mm rectangular wooden block, thickness 10 mm
Vorderbeinbacken, Stärke 18 mm front leg corner block, thickness 18 mm
ohne without
Vorderbeinbacken, 2-fach verschraubt front leg corner blocks, double-bolted
Verbindung des Sitzrahmens mit den Hinterbeinen
Connection of the seat frame with the rear legs
Schlossschraube mit Holzblock carriage bolt with wooden block
Schlossschraube mit Unterlegscheibe carriage bolt with flat washer
nicht mehr bei Nr. 14, gelegentlich noch bei den anderen Sessel-Modellen
no longer in No. 14, found occasionally in other chairs of the model
Gestellschraube, immer bei Nr. 14 patent screw, always in No. 14
Fußring-Verbindung
Leg ring connection
Schrägschäftung bis 110 mm scarf joint up to 110 mm
Schrägschäftung mehr als 110 mm scarf joint more than 110 mm
V-förmige Schäftung v-shaped scarf joint

On the tables

The classification of the tables according to years serves practicality. The technical measures to improve the furniture were not introduced in an annual rhythm. There is no exactly fixed chronology, but rather different possibilities were always tried out simultaneously. The overlapping areas take this into account and indicate these transitional times.

Keeping these overlapping areas in a brighter tone indicates greater uncertainty as to the end of the old and the beginning of the new measures.

Essential in determining the age of a Thonet chair or armchair is the combination of various features. The more of these are present and unique, the more accurate the temporal classification will be.

Kennzeichnungen Labels

Angaben über den Zeitraum der Verwendung der Kennzeichnungen lassen sich aus der Tabelle „Wie alt ist mein Thonet-Sessel?“ entnehmen.

Information on the period of use of the markings can be found in the table “How Old Is My Thonet Chair?”

Papierschutzmarken Paper labels

Schutzmarke Label 1a

Schutzmarke Label 1c

Kreuzung der Schlingmotive wie 1b, doch in der Ausführung grober gearbeitet

Crossing of the loop motifs are like 1b, but more coarse in the execution

Schutzmarke Label 2

Schutzmarke Label 1b

Schutzmarke Label 3

Von 1a leicht zu unterscheiden, da die Schlingmotive, die sich bei 1a oberhalb kreuzen, bei 1b unterhalb liegen und umgekehrt

Easily distinguished from 1a, since the loop motifs that cross over top in 1a cross underneath in 1b and vice versa

Prägestempel Embossed stamps

Schichtverleimte Sitzrahmen
Laminated seat frames

Thonet Wien
Gump. 369

Thonet Wien

Dreiteilig massive und vollständig massive Sitzrahmen
Three-part solid and completely solid seat frames

GB. THONET Wien

Vollständig massive Sitzrahmen
Completely solid seat frames

Thonet Wien

THONET

auch mit weißer Farbe unterlegt
also highlighted with white paint

„THONET“ im Frästeller "THONET" in circular milled area

Kleiner Frästeller Small circular milled area (40 mm)

Großer Frästeller Large circular milled area (62 mm)

Der sogenannte Frästeller wurde ab etwa 1881 verwendet. Er löste den Prägestempel „THONET“ ab. Auf der Innenseite des Sitzrahmens, meist vorne Mitte, wurde ein kreisförmiger Bereich mit einem Durchmesser von etwa 40 mm ausgefräst, damit man eine plane Fläche erhielt, auf der man einen mit schwarzer Farbe unterlegten Stempel „THONET“ einpresste. Später wurde die Fläche bis auf 62 mm vergrößert und erhielt den Zusatz „AUSTRIA“ oder auch eine Zahl, deren Bedeutung nicht eindeutig ist.

The so-called circular milled area was used from about 1881. It replaced the "THONET" embossing stamp. On the inside of the seat frame, usually at the center, a circular area with a diameter of about 40 mm was milled out so that a smooth surface was obtained on which "THONET" was stamped in black. Later, the area was enlarged to 62 mm and received the suffix "AUSTRIA" or a number whose meaning is not clear.

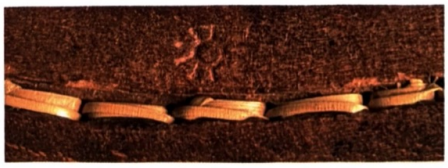
Buchstaben Letters

Schlagzahlen Stamped numbers

meist in Verbindung mit Symbolen
usually in combination with symbols

Symbole Symbols

Sonne mit großem Innenkreis
Sun with large inner circle



Sonne mit kleinem Innenkreis
Sun with small inner circle

häufig auch in Verbindung mit Schlagzahlen
often also in combination with stamped numbers

Stern in Verbindung mit Schlagzahlen
Star in combination with stamped numbers

Time Table 1796 until 2020

Büste von Anna Maria Thonet, nach 1869
Bust of Anna Maria Thonet, after 1869

1796 On 2 July, Michael Thonet is born in Boppard am Rhein (Rhineland-Palatinate) as the second child of tanner master Franz Anton Thonet and his wife Margaretha, née Fischbach.

1810 After receiving a school education, about which, however, no details are known, Michael Thonet begins an apprenticeship as a joiner.

1816 He is released from duty in the Prussian army.

1819 Michael Thonet becomes a self-employed construction carpenter and joiner and takes over his father's workshop.

1820 On 13 April he marries the butcher's daughter Anna Maria Grass (1799–1862), according to family records. This marriage, as can also be seen in the family records, produced 13 children who were all born and baptized in Boppard. The family lived at the so-called Balz, a small square between Steingasse and Pitzgasse. Michael and Anna Maria Thonet's children: Franz 21.12.1820–1.8.1898 Anna Maria 18.4.1823–?, Michael 30.10.1824–25.12.1902, Margaretha 12.8.1826–13.8.1826, Sophia 31.5.1827–16.1.1828, August 28.3.1829–6.3.1910, Joseph 25.5.1830–20.8.1887, Gertrud 9.12.1831–16.6.1832, Gertrud 16.3.1833–?, Johann 15.8.1834–13.2.1835, Heinrich 27.12.1836–25.8.1837, Catharina Josepha Theresia 22.11.1839–12.6.1840, Jacob 30.10.1841–10.11.1929

ca. 1830 Michael Thonet begins with attempts to produce furniture parts by bending thin wooden strips which are glued together.

1830–1836 After several years of experimentation, Michael Thonet manages to bend wood which has been boiled in a glue bath; the so-called "Boppard laminated chairs" have been created. All efforts to obtain a patent in Prussia remain unsuccessful. As of 1832 Michael Thonet lives with his family in a house on Franziskanergasse.

1837 On 2 September, Michael Thonet, together with the pharmacist Genius, buys the so-called Michelmühle [Michel's Mill] in Boppard, where he runs a glue mill until September 1841.

1840 On 25 August, Michael Thonet submits a patent application "for the peculiar method of giving the wood of furniture a suitable form by means of a press" to the district government office in Koblenz, which, however, is rejected for lack of novelty in Berlin.

1841 Michael Thonet applies for patents in France, England, and Russia. In August, he exhibits his furniture at the Fall Fair at the former Paradeplatz, now Görresplatz, in Koblenz. The Austrian Court and State Chancellor Clemens Prince Metternich is made aware of Thonet's furniture. The pharmacist Genius and Michael Thonet sell the Michelsmühle to a Dr. Schmitz.

1842 In April, Thonet issues an ad in the Koblenzer Zeitung in which he seeks journeymen. Michael Thonet travels to Vienna, arriving on 7 May. Between 10–15 May he presents his furniture at court. On May 14, Michael Thonet and Johann van Meerten apply for the privilege of "bringing any kind of wood, even the most brittle type, into any form and curve using chemical-mechanical means." This privilege is awarded by the Imperial Royal Court Chamber on 16 July. In Boppard, the creditors who had pre-financed Michael Thonet's projects, but no longer believed in the success of his work, pressure his family to repay the borrowed money. On 1 July, Thonet, who is in Vienna, signs a power of attorney for his wife and son Franz concerning the property in Boppard. In the fall, Michael Thonet's family moves to Vienna; However, Franz stays in Boppard and tries to start his own business there. In September, Franz Thonet furnishes the German Industrial Exhibition in Mainz with his father's furniture, however, with great difficulty since his father is already in Vienna.

1843 On 24 February, Michael Thonet's property in Boppard is publicly auctioned; the creditors are paid out.

1842–1846 Together with his sons, Michael Thonet works for the furniture manufacturer Franz List at Mariahilfer Straße 42, from 1843/44 to May 1849 at Leistler's "Fabrik für Maschinenparquetten" [Factory for Machine-Made Parquet], at Gumpendorf 9 (now Kaunitzgasse 2–6), since the objection of Vienna guilds and lack of capital prevent him from being able to become self-employed.

1843–1846 Michael Thonet and his sons work exclusively on the interior design of the Palais Liechtenstein in Carl Leistler's factory. Thonet produces about 900 square meters of parquet panels and a series of running chairs for the Palais Liechtenstein. In the latter case, he is testing a new manufacturing process, the bending of rod bundles.

1849 Since Leistler rejects Thonet's offer for a partnership, Thonet begins to work independently in Gumpendorf at Hauptstraße 396 in May.

1849/50 Start of production of the Schwarzenberg Chair, a simplified version of the chair for Palais Liechtenstein. The Schwarzenberg Chair already has all the formal and constructive features of the later series models and then appears as Chair No. 1 with capitals on the front legs on the first sales posters.

1850 Michael Thonet presents his Chair No. 4 at an exhibition of the Lower Austrian Trade Association in Vienna.

1851 In the first half of the year, Michael Thonet furnishes the hotel "Zur Königin von England" in Budapest with four dozen chairs and one dozen Model No. 4 armchairs. In summer, he receives a large order from the coffeehouse owner Daum, who exchanges his heavy Biedermeier furniture for the light chair No. 4. Mr. Daum orders "four dozen chairs, twenty banquettes (benches along the walls), a credenza, and several tiered mahogany shelves" from Thonet. Thonet participates in the London World Fair. There he exhibits mainly art joinery work, but also, for the first time, a set consisting of a chair, an armchair, and a sofa and receives the bronze medal, the highest award for industrial products.

1852 Michael Thonet acquires a new privilege on 28 July in the name of his sons, which protects his improved bending process (bends in all directions). In Palais Montenuovo, on today's Löwelstraße in the center of Vienna, Michael Thonet opens his first sales branch. In spring, the company moves from Gumpendorf to larger premises at Mollardgasse 153 (former Mollard Mill). In order to protect himself against copyists of his furniture, Michael Thonet marks the furniture produced for general sale on the bottom of the seat ring with the stamp "Thonet Wien Gump. 396."

1853 The company Gebrüder Thonet is founded on 1 November; the five sons are partners. However, Michael Thonet reserves the overall direction and the representation of the youngest sons, who have not yet reached the age of majority, for himself. A steam engine is purchased for the factory which employs approximately 40 workers.

1854 Gebrüder Thonet participates in the Munich Trade Fair, where models No. 2 and 3, and a model similar to the later No. 21 are shown.

1855 Gebrüder Thonet applies for the "simple factory authorization" in April and receives this authorization on 8 July and is now independent of the joiner's guild. The company is awarded a silver medal at the Paris World Fair.

1856 Michael Thonet and his sons Michael and Joseph receive Austrian citizenship on 16 August, Franz and August on 27 December, the other sons presumably the following year. On 10 July, the Thonets receive the so-called solid wood privilege "for the manufacturing of chairs, armchairs, sofas, and table legs made of wood bent by steam and boiling liquids." The privilege is "voluntarily returned" in 1869 under pressure from competitors. The first furniture factory is built in Koryčany, Moravia, according to plans by Michael Thonet and production starts. The solid bent parts are initially assembled in Vienna.

1857 On 9 November, the simple factory warrant is extended to a state factory warrant "for the production of furniture, parquet, and other wood products".

1858 The furniture can now be completely assembled in Koryčany. The operation in the Mollard Mill is abandoned, instead, a second sales branch is established in Vienna-Leopoldstadt. On 14 September, the state factory warrant is transferred from Vienna to Moravia.

1859 The production of Chair No. 14 begins in Koryčany.

1860 On 8 January, Thonet receives a patent for a new hub design for the wheels of heavy wagons and gun carriages, which is valid until 8 January 1865.

ca. 1860 Presumably first sales poster of all furniture in stock.

1860/61 Construction of a factory in Bystřice pod Hostýnem, Moravia, which begins production in 1861.

1861 In October, establishment of the first sales branch outside of Vienna in Pest (Budapest), in Lika house at No. 303/3 Dorottya utca.

1862 Anna Maria Thonet, Michael Thonet's wife, dies in the Thonet home at Kaiser-Josef-Straße 40 (now Heinestraße) in Leopoldstadt on 10 January. Gebrüder Thonet participate in the second London World Fair and open their first sales branch in London, at 16 Ludgate Hill.

1865 Construction of the factory in Nagy Ugrócz / Velké Uherce (today Slovakia), which starts operations in 1866.

1867 Gebrüder Thonet conclude timber delivery contracts in Galicia and Moravia. Beechwood is sawn into slats in their own sawmills, then worked on turning machines and forwarded to Koryčany and Bystřice pod Hostýnem. In the dominion of Vsetín, Moravia, Gebrüder Thonet follows the same principle. The local sawmill Halenkov, Moravia, is expanded into a complete factory over the following years. Gebrüder Thonet participates successfully in the second Paris World Fair.

1869 After the patent for bending solid wood had to be returned, the first competing companies emerge, most notably, the Jacob & Joseph Kohn company.

1871 On 3 March Michael Thonet dies in Vienna.

1872 The factory in Vsetín is built.

1873 Gebrüder Thonet participates in the World Fair in Vienna.

1876 Gebrüder Thonet participates in the World Fair in Philadelphia.

1880 Construction of the factory in Novo-Radomsk, in present-day Poland (Radomsko).

ca. 1881 Redesign of the trademark, which now has only the name "THONET" and "WIEN." The "circular milled area" with the lettering "THONET," later "THONET Austria," is used for the first time.

1888 Gebrüder Thonet develop the world's first folding chair for theaters.

1889 Construction of factory in Frankenberg (Hesse).

1893 More than a million pieces of furniture are manufactured each year in the Thonet factories.

1898 Franz Thonet, Michael Thonet's oldest son, dies in Boppard. Adolf Loos designs a bentwood chair for the Café Museum in Vienna (1899), thus opening the door for modern architectural furniture made of bentwood (produced by J. & J. Kohn).

1905 Thonet makes contact with the Viennese avant-garde. Together with the company Jacob & Joseph Kohn, Gebrüder Thonet receives the order to furnish the Postal Savings Bank in Vienna, designed by architect Otto Wagner. The result is a collaboration with Wagner's student Marcel Kammerer, which will be influential for the following years.

1914 At the Werkbund exhibition in Cologne Gebrüder Thonet displays a furniture ensemble by Otto Prutscher, who provides the company with numerous designs over the years up to the interwar period.

1914–1918 Since more than half of the workers in the factories are conscripted to military service, it is possible to carry out production on only two days of the week. The workers produce mainly cases for munition.

1917 The J.& J. Kohn company is completely taken over by Mundus.

1919 After the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Thonet's possessions are located in Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Independent companies are founded for political and tax reasons. The Thonet company suffers losses through lost war bonds and hard-fought price wars.

1924 Gebrüder Thonet merges with the Mundus Group and henceforth forming Thonet Mundus. The seat of management is located in Vienna, for tax reasons the official headquarters are in Zug in Switzerland. Leopold Pilzer becomes the General Director. Following immense losses during the World War, Leopold Pilzer succeeds in achieving 75 percent of the pre-war profits within two years by carrying out a severe reduction of the product range. After all, the major corporation now has the export markets of America, Africa, and India once again.

1927 Bentwood chairs from Thonet are displayed as examples of contemporary furnishings at the Werkbund exhibition at the Weissenhof housing development in Stuttgart. The tubular steel chairs without rear legs ("cantilever") by Mart Stam and Mies van der Rohe are seen for the first time at this exhibition. Over the following years Thonet secures the rights to the best tubular steel designs, including, among others, those from Marcel Breuer.

1929 On 11 April, Standard Möbel goes bankrupt and Thonet acquires the company along with the rights to all of its models.

1930 The first tubular steel catalog from Thonet, the so-called plug-in card catalog, is published. Thonet sets up a new department for the production of tubular steel furniture at the Frankenberg factory. The production is extended to include the models of Thonet France.

1931/32 Through a license agreement with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, the Gebrüder Thonet AG secures the rights to all models he has designed so far.

1933 Anton Lorenz, former CEO of Standard Möbel wins in the trial against the Gebrüder Thonet AG, the three-year dispute over the rights to the cantilever chair is over. After Mart Stam's authorship of the cantilever chair is confirmed, the Thonet company and Anton Lorenz, to whom Stam's rights had already been transferred in 1929, signed a contract allowing Thonet to produce the cantilever chair under the license belonging to Lorenz's company Desta. Thonet thus has a monopoly on the production of cantilever chairs. Lorenz himself, as the head of the Intellectual Property Department, receives a fixed salary from Thonet until September 1935. Through a contract with Walter Knoll, the range is also supplemented by the models from his company–mainly upholstered tubular steel furniture. Thonet is thus de facto the most important producer of modern tubular steel furniture.

1937 Michael Thonet's great-grandson, the engineer Georg Thonet, comes from Vienna to Frankenberg and takes over the tubular steel division.

1938 Leopold Pilzer is forced to emigrate to the USA due to his Jewish descent. He makes a previous agreement with Richard and Victor Thonet. In this contract Pilzer agrees to return the Mundus Group's shares to Richard and Victor Thonet in return for all stocks belonging to the German Gebrüder Thonet AG and all shares in the Austrian Gebrüder Thonet OHG. In addition, Gebrüder Thonet have the right to sell furniture called "Thonet" in Germany and Austria. This permission must be reissued every 25 years. All export transactions are handled by the Mundus Group. The name rights for France, England, and the USA remain the property of Leopold Pilzer.

1940 Even before Leopold Pilzer leaves Europe, he sends his employee Eugene Halward to the USA to find suitable production sites. Production is resumed in existing furniture factories in Statesville, York, and Sheboygan. The head office of Thonet Industries is set up by Pilzer himself on New York's Park Avenue. In the years that follow, a number of universities and colleges are furnished with Thonet models.

1945 After the Thonet headquarters at Stephansplatz/Rotentrumstraße in Vienna fell victim to the firestorm of 12 April, the factory in Frankenberg is completely destroyed in an air raid on the directly adjacent railyard. All other factories located in the east fall under state control after the end of the Second World War. The companies Thonet Frankenberg, Thonet Wien, Thonet Frères, and Thonet Industries ultimately produce independently.

1947 In September, the production of bentwood furniture is started at the factory rebuilt by Georg Thonet in Frankenberg.

1948 Thonet's tubular steel furniture production starts again in rented premises in Düsseldorf. The company Gebrüder Thonet Vienna starts production in a workshop at the Weißgerberlände. The company manager is Dr. Fritzjakob Thonet.

1950 The exports of the German Gebrüder Thonet are handled by the Swiss representation of Thonet Industries in Zug. In this year, also the first catalog for hotels and restaurants is published.

1953 Exports to European countries are no longer handled by the Swiss representative of Thonet Industries, but are rather carried out directly by Gebrüder Thonet following an agreement with Leopold Pilzer. The company Thonet Möbel AG in Zug is dissolved by Leopold Pilzer. He hands over the trademark rights to Thonet Frères Paris.

1954 In Frankenberg tubular steel is also processed again in addition to bentwood. Substantial parts of the Viennese production are moved to Rohrbach/Lafnitz (Styria), where Gebrüder Thonet Vienna leases a factory.

1959 Leopold Pilzer, founder of Thonet Industries Inc., dies, and Bruno Weill, Pilzer's stepson becomes his successor.

1962 Thonet Frères is sold to André Leclerc and after Bruno Weill's death Thonet Industries Inc. is sold to Simmons. Thonet Industries and Gebrüder Thonet agree that Gebrüder Thonet have trademark rights within the EEC.

1963 After several years of leasing, Gebrüder Thonet Vienna builds a new factory in Friedberg (Styria).

1969 The Thonet company celebrates the 150th anniversary of its founding by Michael Thonet in Boppard.

1970 In Frankenberg, a second, 7 200 square meter plant is under construction. In the first phase, the expanded areas for the production of tubular steel furniture, shipping, and upholstering are completed.

1971 In Vienna, at Kohlmarkt 7, the original location of the Café Anna Daum, Gebrüder Thonet Vienna set up a new sales branch, designed by Eva and Karl Mang.

1973 Dr. Fritzjakob Thonet, the founder of Gebrüder Thonet Vienna, dies.

1975 The two Thonet families exchange their shares; Thonet Germany and Thonet Austria are therewith separated in terms of ownership.

1976 Evamaria Schmertzing-Thonet and Richard E. Thonet, children of the deceased Fritzjakob, take over the management of Thonet Austria; the company becomes Gebrüder Thonet Vienna.

1977 The factory in Friedberg is expanded by two production halls.

1978 The Frankenberg factory is expanded again, this time by several thousand square meters. Gebrüder Thonet Inc., is converted into a limited company. Managing Directors are the engineers Georg and Claus M. Thonet. Richard E. Thonet becomes part of the Gebrüder Thonet Vienna company.

1979 Gulf and Western Corporation buys Thonet Industries Inc. from Simmons Corporation.

1981 In Frankenberg, more than 20 000 square meters are available for production and storage after another factory extension.

1987 Thonet Industries Inc. is acquired by Shelby Williams Industries and Manfred Steinfeld becomes Chairman of the Board.

1988 The building on the Weißgerberlände bought by Gebrüder Thonet Vienna in 1948 is sold. A new office building at Berggasse 31 is designed by H.-W. Tanos. A year later, the company can move into the building.

1989 Gebrüder Thonet celebrates the 100-year anniversary of the founding of the company in Frankenberg. The company museum is expanded and reopened for this event.

1993 New Gebrüder Thonet sales offices are opened in Dresden, Berlin, and Prague.

1994 Opening of the Thonet Museum in Friedberg.

1996 The Cologne-based company Lafo takes over the management of Thonet Vienna and one of the co-owners is Wolfgang Mellinghof.

2001 Gebrüder Thonet Vienna is sold to the renowned Italian upholstered furniture manufacturer Poltrona Frau.

2006 The factory in Friedberg is closed, the company headquarters is moved to Turin.

2013 Franco Moschini, former president of Poltrona Frau, founds a new company called GTV Wiener Design.

Firmenschild der Gebrüder Thonet, um 1890, Firmensammlung GTV Wiener Design
Gebrüder Thonet company sign, ca. 1890, Company Collection GTV Wiener Design

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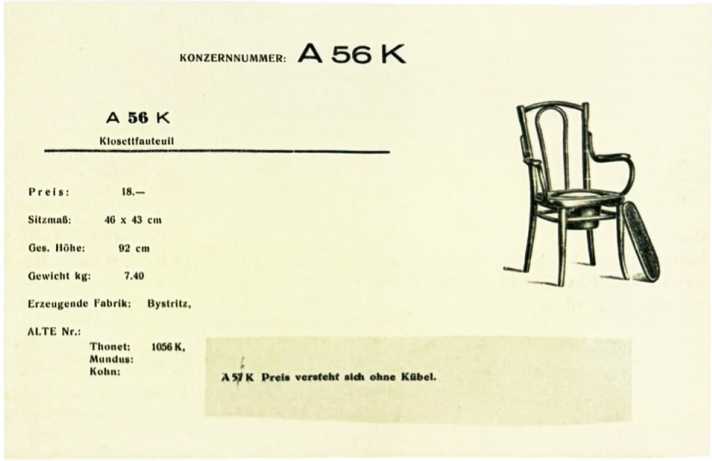
KONZERNNUMMER: A 56 K

A 56 K
Klosettfauteuil

Preis: 18.—
Sitzmaß: 46 x 43 cm
Ges. Höhe: 92 cm
Gewicht kg: 7.40
Erzeugende Fabrik: Bystritz,
ALTE Nr.:
Thonet: 1056 K,
Mundus:
Kohn:

A 56 K Preis versteht sich ohne Kübel.

Karteikarte von Thonet Mundus für den Klosettfauteuil A 56 K, um 1925
(erstmals angeboten im *Zentral-Anzeiger* 29 vom 15. Februar 1911 als Nr. 6956 Ek)
Index card from Thonet Mundus for the bathroom armchair A 56 K, ca. 1925
(first offered as No. 6956 Ek in the *Zentral-Anzeiger* 29 from 15 February 1911)

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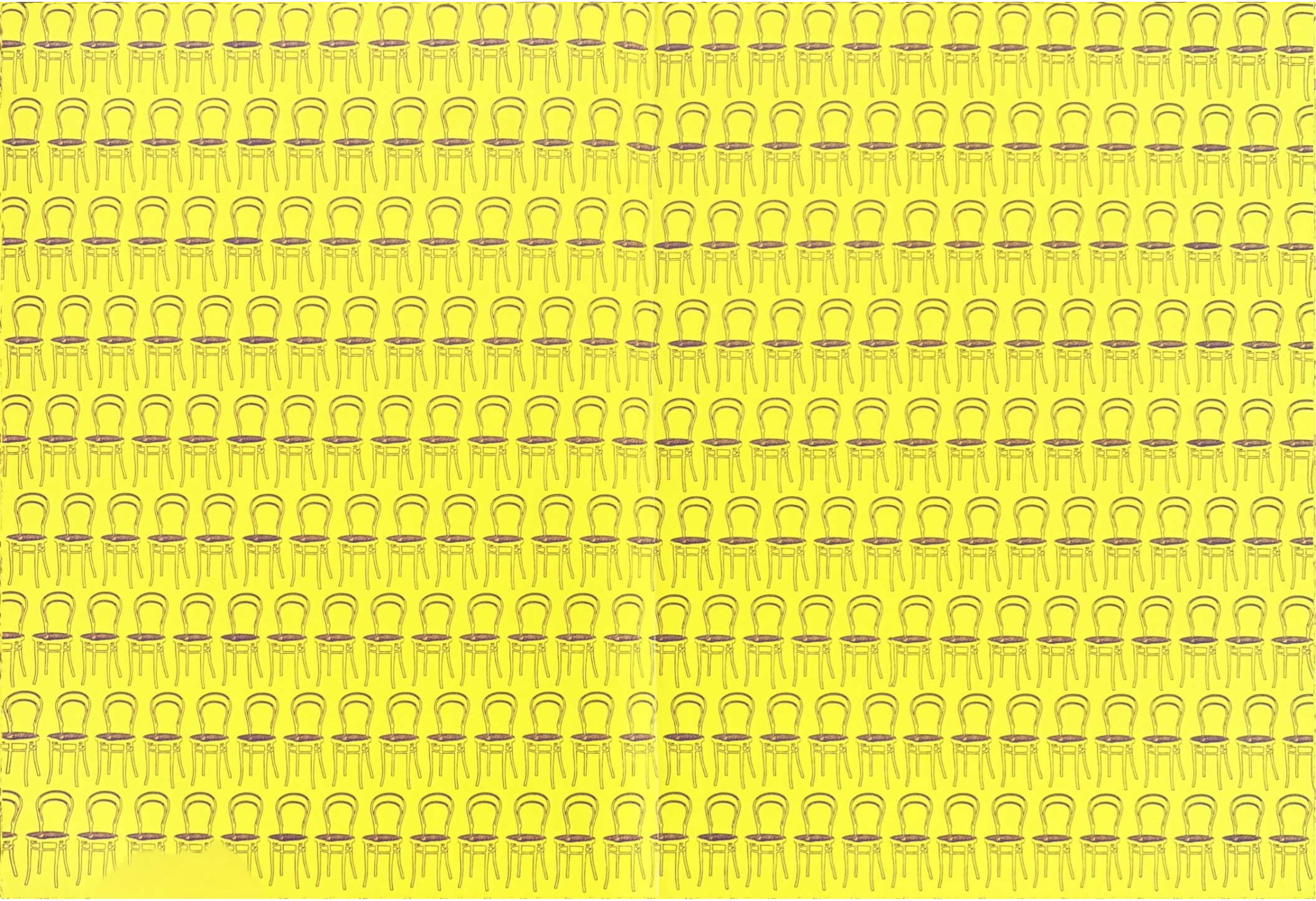
200 THONET
CONTEMPORARY SINCE 1819

TON

GEBRÜDER THONET VIENNA
WIENER ·GTV· DESIGN
HERITAGE DESIGNS THE FUTURE



Durch die Perfektionierung der von ihm entwickelten Bugholztechnik konnte der aus dem Rheinland stammende Tischler Michael Thonet das größte Möbelimperium des 19. Jahrhunderts begründen. Mit dem ab 1859 produzierten Sessel Nr. 14 schuf das von ihm an seine Söhne weitergegebene Unternehmen – Gebrüder Thonet – nicht nur eines der bis heute weltweit meistverkauften Möbelstücke, sondern auch einen unbestrittenen Klassiker des modernen Industriedesigns. Anlässlich des 200-Jahr-Jubiläums des Unternehmens Thonet widmet sich das MAK mit diesem Ausstellungskatalog einem spannenden Kapitel der Möbelgeschichte. Die charakteristischen Bugholzsessel des weltbekannten Unternehmens werden in den Kontext zeitgenössischer technologischer, typologischer, ästhetischer und historischer Entwicklungen gestellt, wodurch sich viele neue Perspektiven auf das Möbeldesign der Moderne ergeben.

By perfecting the bentwood technique he developed, the joiner Michael Thonet, originally from the Rhineland, was able to found the largest furniture empire of the 19th century. With chair No. 14, which was produced starting in 1859, the company which he passed on to his sons–Gebrüder Thonet–produced not only one of the world's best-selling pieces of furniture, but also an undisputed classic of modern industrial design. With this exhibition catalog, published on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of Thonet, the MAK devotes itself to an exciting chapter in the history of furniture. The characteristic bentwood chairs of the world-famous company are placed in the context of contemporary, typological, aesthetic, and historical developments, giving rise to many new perspectives on modern furniture design.

Herausgegeben von Edited by Christoph Thun-Hohenstein und and Sebastian Hackenschmidt

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